JESUS GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

The Alternative Theories About Christ

WILLIAM BRAMLEY

JESUS GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

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RELIGION

JESUS GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

The Alternative Theories About Christ

At last!

Everything you never wanted to know about Christ, or were afraid to ask.

Join author William Bramley as he surveys all of the major alternative theories about Christ, and provides you with the primary evidence in support of each theory, along with some of the arguments against them. It will be up to you, the reader, to decide what is true.

Did Jesus survive the crucifixion and preach afterwards?

What were his connections to strange mystery religions?

How did hallucinogens affect Christianity?

Who, or what, were the angels that were said to be in contact with Christ?

Did Jesus visit other continents, including North America?

Was he a saint? A madman? A myth?

Jesus Christ continues to spark the public imagination through books and movies that present many different views of him. *Jesus Goes to Hollywood* fills in the gaps with a fascinating summary of the most popular and enduring theories about Christ.

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The author as a young man.

William Bramley is a best-selling author who enjoys researching and writing on a wide variety of provocative topics.

"I wrote *Jesus Goes to Hollywood,*" says Bramley, "because religion is a force for both good and bad that is having an enormous impact on our world right now. Humanity needs to grow up spiritually, and to do that, we need to gain a better understanding of who our religious founders really were, what they actually taught, and why. The consequences of ignorance have become too severe. I hope that *Jesus Goes to Hollywood* helps in the search for answers."

Bramley respects the intelligence of his readers, and he packs his writings with in-depth research and hard-to-find information. He offers new ways of looking at the world and the forces that drive it.

"The worst fear we can have is the fear of changing our minds," Bramley notes. "Journeys of thought are the most important trips we make as human beings. They change us and the world. Always dare to look and think."

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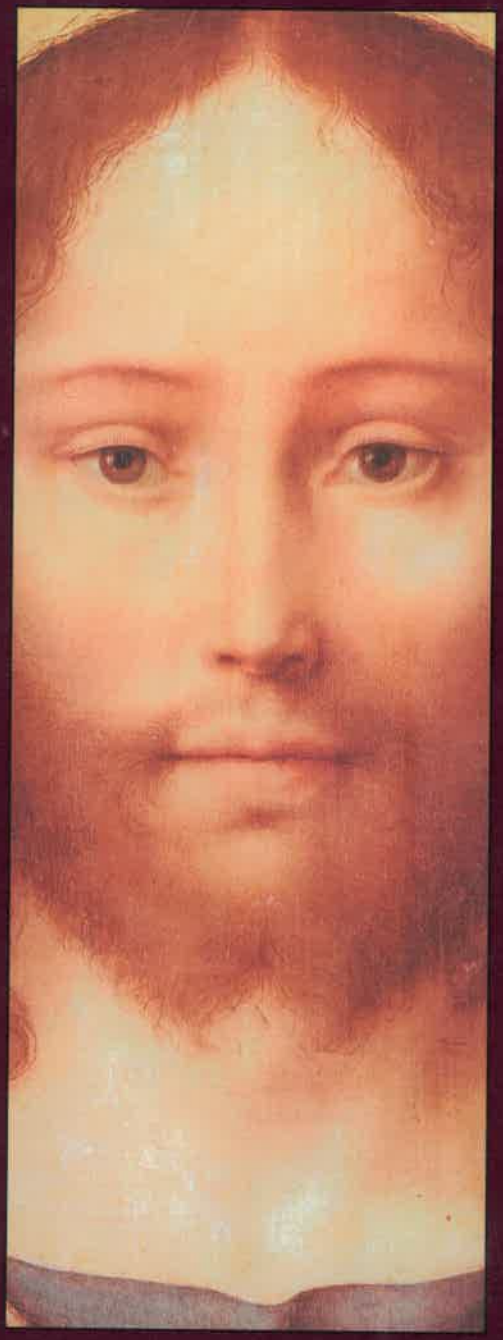
WHO WAS JESUS? REALLY.



For the first time ever, all of the major alternative theories about Christ are brought together in a single book. Join William Bramley as he explores fascinating questions about history's most famous man:

Where did Jesus go during his Missing Years? Is it true that he sailed to England or traveled to Asia?

Did he have children? If so, how many? Or was he gay?

What did he look like? Did he have black skin? Or was he white with red hair?

Does the New Testament reveal his true teachings, or did he say something very different?

Did he even exist at all?

This is a journey that will take you through the hallowed halls of academia to the outer fringes of reality. As the road twists and turns, you will encounter controversial relics like the Shroud of Turin, read the inscription on a tomb in the Himalayas, and wonder about the strange phenomena surrounding the crucifixion. You will participate in academic debates and peruse best-selling pop culture books.

In the end, Jesus may never look the same.

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DAHLIN & ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHER

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THE ALTERNATIVE THEORIES ABOUT CHRIST

William Bramley

DAHLIN & ASSOCIATES
PUBLISHER

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Abbreviations Used in this Book

Bible Abbreviations

KJV: King James Version
NAB: New American Bible
NIV: New International Version
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version
REB: Revised English Bible

Other Abbreviations

A.D.: Anno Domini (after the birth of Christ.
Often designated *C.E.:* Christian Era)
b.: born.
B.C.: Before Christ (often designated *B.C.E.:*
Before the Christian Era)
Although the once-common abbreviations "A.D." and "B.C." are no longer favored by scholars, I decided to use them because I anticipate that this book will be read by many lay persons. "B.C.E." and "C.E." can be confusing for some people, whereas "A.D." and "B.C." stand apart easily. This is a book about Christ, so I feel that the Christ-based abbreviations remain appropriate.
c.: circa (approximately)
d.: died.
e.g: exempli gratia ("for example")
i.e.: id est ("that is," "in other words")

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Introduction

This book is both a detective story and reference work. It will guide you along many paths in search of a man whose immense influence still flickers with mystery. Like the reporter in the American film classic *Citizen Kane,* we will go in search of clues about a person who looms large in the eyes of the world but whose life is surrounded by riddles. We will question many people and receive answers of all kinds, but we know that everyone cannot be right because they often contradict each other; yet those contradictions cause the mystery to grow ever more intriguing. At the end of our search, it will be up to you—the reader—to decide the truth, or continue the journey.

Not every theory or piece of evidence about Jesus can be included in a single-volume work of this kind. I present only those theories that are supported by some arguable facts or evidence, but I still journey well into the fringes, and in Chapter 21 I abandon all seriousness. Despite my effort to leave no stone unturned, I will inevitably miss many interesting theories, facts, and perspectives that I would have included had I known about them. Perhaps the only two exceptions are the pesher-based theories of Barbara Thiering* (see, *e.g., Jesus the Man, Jesus of the Apocalypse,* and *The Book That Jesus Wrote*) and some of the related Grail (bloodline) theories (see, *e.g., Bloodline of the Holy Grail* by Laurence Gardner), not because they do not deserve inclusion in book like this, but because they involve complex explanations that are best explored by consulting those writings directly. Several of the theories that

* A "pesher" is a hidden meaning or interpretation that a writer intends to convey through words that seem to say something different. Dr. Thiering postulates that some ancient writers were secretly writing about Jesus even if it did not appear so on the surface, or if they made obvious references to Christ, they were secretly imparting more or different information than it seemed. Thiering supports her theory by applying pesher analysis (the Pesher Technique) to such writings. Thiering's books have proven popular with lay audiences, but New Testament scholars have not widely embraced her perspective.

they develop, for example that Jesus had children and survived the crucifixion, are covered in this book with evidence drawn from other sources.

Jesus Goes to Hollywood is intended to appeal to the investigator in you. I begin with the simple basics and quickly build from there. The following pages do not always make for easy reading because I must grind through obscure details and academic debates that only history professors can love, but these things ultimately relate to the bigger questions of who Jesus was and what he taught. To make the burden easier, I introduce each chapter with an ongoing fictional story about a man who might be Jesus Christ back for his Second Coming. An agent in Hollywood is eager to represent him, hence the title of this book. If the story is not to your liking, feel free to skip it since it is not integral to the main text.

In the chapters to follow, I try to allow as many voices to be heard as possible. But be warned: some of the material in this book is extremely controversial, and I make no attempts to sugarcoat it. I write most chapters from the perspective of an advocate who is trying to convince you of the truth of each theory, but that is a literary device I am using to convey the information and evidence most effectively. My private opinions may be different. For example, some people find chapter 3 very persuasive, *i.e.*, that Jesus never existed at all. I think that he did.

There is one very simple but important point that must be made. This is a book about the historical Jesus. I do not directly explore the esoteric questions about him such as whether he was the Son of God or if he had a special relationship to a Supreme Being. I also use the names "Jesus" and "Christ" interchangeably for literary purposes. "Christ," however, is actually a title, and to many Christians it means the risen son of God who brings salvation, and so they are careful to use "Christ" in that context only, while "Jesus" typically refers to the man. When I write "Christ" in the pages to follow, I am not trying to inject the concept of a risen Son of God, I am merely using it as the last name of the historical Jesus in the same way that I would use it to discuss someone living today who happens to have the last name Christ.

A number of people have suggested that I include a discussion of the novel *The Da Vinci Code*. This was a recent best-seller by Dan Brown that skillfully incorporated some alternative theories about Christ and secret societies into an engaging murder-mystery. I devote an entire chapter to one of the key theories in Brown's book, namely that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had children together. *The Da Vinci Code* also discusses da Vinci's unorthodox beliefs and how he may have expressed them in his art work. For example, in his painting of the Last Supper, it appears that Leonardo portrayed an apostle next to Jesus as a female. Does this mean Leonardo believed that Christ's favorite apostle was Mary Magdalene, or did Leonardo, who was gay, embrace traditions that Christ's favorite was an androgynous male youth? I will leave it to other writers to explore these and other interesting questions raised by Dan Brown's text. Two helpful books are *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code* by Bart D. Ehrman and *Cracking the Da Vinci Code* by Simon Cox.

I am frequently asked my motivation for writing this book. I am one of the many people in the world who professes to be "spiritual but not religious." As a non-Christian with no formal religious affiliation, I am persuaded that spiritual realities exist. However, I have no interest in developing or following a belief system; I just want to know the "real deal." What is it actually all about? That question is much easier asked than answered. For every answer that I think I might have, my mind poses a dozen more questions. This book is a small part of my effort to come to grips with the bigger topic of what we might be spiritually and how this affects our welfare. I am convinced of one thing only: there is not a single religion, science, or spiritual path that has all of the answers. One or two answers, yes, a large handful, sometimes, but not the hundreds more that are needed.

There are some Christians who believe that their spiritual salvation depends on holding firm to their existing belief system. Any fact or perspective that might introduce a doubt poses a grave threat. Such readers may prefer to skip this book, or read it at their own risk. To those curious undaunted others, I hope that you will find some interest in the pages to come. Just remember: the choice of what to believe is always yours.

Happy sleuthing!

The Rumor

It was a typical Wednesday morning. Orion Shaw was seated comfortably in his Beverly Hills office at Global Talent Associates, better known as GTA. Orion's agency had roared to the front of the pack a couple of years earlier when three major stars abandoned their agents and asked GTA to sign them on. A stampede of talent followed. GTA's relentless publicity machine ensured that client visibility and income remained high.

Orion leaned back to gaze out the window as he fielded calls.

"Jack!" he enthused. "The buzz around town is that you're leading the pack for another Globe! And you know Oscar's hovering just around the corner, right?...Now, listen. I don't want you to ink *Kamp Kellie* until Paramount gives us that extra half-point on gross...No, they'll balk maybe a day or two. Tops...Trust me on this…Sure, thanks for the invitation. We'll touch base tomorrow."

(Click)

(Buzz!)

"What line?…Sharon! Will from Tri-Star just dropped the good news on me...That's right! Three pictures at thirty million a pop. I just got the fax to confirm...What?...No, I have no idea what's wrong with your garbage disposal...Does it have a red button underneath?…Push it...I'll wait...Nothing?...No! Don't you put those beautiful hands into that thing...Don't move! I'm sending a plumber!"

(Buzz!)

"Sandy, get an emergency plumber out to Sharon's right away, would you? And please take messages for a few minutes."

Orion ran his hands through his thick wavy blond hair. At forty-three years of age, he had the energy of a someone fifteen years younger, but his just-under-six-foot frame still did not escape signs of wear. A little grey at his temples and an extra furrow in his brow were reminders of his mortality, even if they did give him a certain augustness as one of Hollywood's power brokers.

All of this meant nothing to him now. A call was overdue from GTA's top agent in New York, Doris Randolph. Orion had

put her on the chase to find someone who in all probability was a complete phony, but Orion felt oddly compelled to make the effort.

(Buzz!)

(Click!)

"Doris! What's happening?...Uh-huh...How carefully did you check him out?...Listen, it goes without saying that if he's legit, this is hot. Big time...What makes people think he's really Jesus Christ?...No kidding...Listen, I have no idea if he's just a New Age wannabe with delusions, but let's not take chances. Roll out the red carpet with a limo and first class air. Just get him on a plane tonight. He's going to need *The Tonight Show* and *Good Morning America,* and we can deliver. Tell him that. If he's the real thing, we'll make sure it happens for him...Good!...Call me at home when you hit the airport."

Orion rose to organize his thoughts. An odd but compelling rumor had begun circulating in New York that Jesus Christ was there to begin his Second Coming. Not only did it appear to be true, but other media had caught wind of it. Orion's challenge was to snag this "Mr. Christ" and convince him that he needed an agent, namely GTA. Orion took a deep breath as he contemplated the staggering sums of money that could be made from a genuine Second Coming of Christ. The operative word in this case was "genuine." How would he be able to tell if this man was authentic?

Orion was not raised in a religious home. In fact, he took pride in the fact that his parents were San Francisco hippies who had met in the 1960's during a folk rock concert in Golden Gate Park. That night as they lay together under a blanket watching the stars, aroused by the music and warm kisses, they touched heaven and conceived Orion. When he was three years old, his parents married on a cliff overlooking the Pacific; in attendance were twelve friends and four dogs, all wearing crowns of daisies. Now as an adult, clients often remarked to Orion about his name, which is a constellation of stars. How appropriate that his career involved making stars in the Hollywood heavens.

He pushed a button on the phone.

"Sandy...Do me a favor. Get Steve Krasner on the line. Remember him? He's that religion professor at UCLA who helped us with the little Hindu girl last year."

Orion paced the floor several times. His limp was especially annoying to him right now because it clouded his thoughts with painful memories of a near-fatal car wreck the year before, and he needed his mind to be clear.

(Buzz!)

"Steve! Thanks for picking up...No, she never came back to L.A., but now she's the Shirley Temple of Bombay...I have a strange reason for calling. Tomorrow I might be spending time with a guy who says he's Jesus Christ...Seriously! You heard about it, too?... Strange, isn't it?...The bottom line is that I'm out of my element here. I don't think I could tell a real Jesus Christ from an imposter...No, I can't say that I do understand religion very well. Can you boil it down for me?"

Chapter 1

Religion: What is It?

Religion has been with us longer than the human race has kept written records. No matter how modern we become or how societies change, religion survives it all.

It is not easy to define religion because it means many things to so many people. Perhaps it is best described as a human effort to make connections to nonmaterial realities, whatever those realities might be. It typically involves a set of beliefs about the origin of life and the universe, and by this definition science itself can become a religion, and to some people it has. But religion typically postulates something that most sciences do not: the existence of a self-aware consciousness that is not an element of our material world, or that is at least separable from any material object that the consciousness may inhabit, including human bodies. In the Western world, such consciousness is commonly labeled "God," "souls," "spirits," etc.

Most major religions teach that we are souls inhabiting human bodies. The soul, not the body, is the actual person. The body is simply a vehicle or vessel that eventually stops working, but the soul continues on. Some religions say that there is an original spiritual being (*i.e.*, a "God" or "Supreme Being") that was the source and/or creator of all other souls, and perhaps of the universe in which we live.

In this book, we will be dealing with a special kind of religion, namely salvation (redemption) religion. "Salvation" is the act of saving something that is damaged or in danger of becoming lost. Salvation religions typically teach that we are in big trouble as souls and at risk of suffering a miserable fate. These religions promise to fix the injury and guide people toward a happier future.

Salvation sects abound in great variety. They differ in how they define the essential problem and by the solutions they offer:

Is the problem a lack of proper contact with God?
How is it fixed?
Is our personal spiritual awareness too low?
How do we increase it?

Are we supposed to pray? If so, to whom or to what?
Should we meditate?
Study?
Will correct living do the trick?
Or thinking the right thoughts?
Must we eat, or not eat, certain foods?
All of the above?
None of the above?
How are we supposed to find out?

These are simple questions that lead people to pursue profound answers. They have led people to great inspiration and to atrocity, to compassion and to intolerance. As we continue the quest for answers today, religion continues to promote better lives and senseless deaths. In the middle of all this, we find the man known as Jesus Christ.

Radio Minister

Orion awoke on Thursday morning to find his face buried in his wife Serena's silky brown hair. He quietly savored the soft smells of her skin and unobtrusive perfume. He realized this morning, as he did almost every morning, that he loved her more with each passing year.

Orion and Serena had met as students twenty years earlier at UCLA when she was a freshman. She and her dorm mate had responded to one of the many notices posted by film students seeking actors. The filmmaker behind this particular notice was Orion, who was in his junior year. Serena and Orion hit it off immediately, and they married soon after her graduation. Orion launched an unsuccessful bid to become a movie director, but in failure he discovered his true calling as a deal maker. Serena's college foray into acting was only a lark, and she went on to earn a masters degree in languages. She now directed an international adoption agency where her facility with languages came to good use. There was a spark of deep compassion in Serena's blue eyes and ready smile that Orion had come to love. She found great satisfaction in helping victims of childhood tragedy rebuild their lives through new families.

"Cooking up another big deal?" Serena asked as they munched on a breakfast of eggs and whole grain toast. She could sense that her husband was more preoccupied than usual.

"I'm not sure. It's either the biggest deal of my life or a crazy waste of time. I have an appointment today with someone who says he's Jesus Christ."

"Oh, really? Is he the one from New York?"

"Yes! Why does everybody seem to know about him except me?"

"Bernie's wife told me at lunch yesterday. She just heard the rumor but doesn't know anything else."

"I snuck out of the bedroom last night and sat up until three in the morning reading that Bible your sister gave us.

"That will make her happy. No wonder you've been yawning so much."

"I thought I should know something about the original Jesus in case this is really him again."

"Good idea."

Orion glanced at his watch. "Uh-oh! Gotta run!"

Orion gave Serena a quick kiss on the lips. "Mmmm. Coffee flavored."

"Made specially for you, Sweetie. Good luck today."

"Thanks. I may need it."

Orion normally drove his restored 1962 Fiat to work, but today he chose the Rolls which might impress his potential new client. He hit the scan button on the radio console.

"*...Baby, baby, show me your love...*"

"...fifteen people died and forty-seven were injured when a train derailed outside of Paris..."

"...It's the tiny nugget with the great big taste!..."

"...now sing His praises! Raise your voice to the Heavens and say hallelujah!"

Orion interrupted the scan so that he could listen to the evangelist. This was a first for him because he never before had any interest in preachers, radio or otherwise. This time Orion was curious. What exactly does this Christian minister believe about Jesus?

Chapter 2

Jesus: Son of God and Savior

Jesus Christ is surely the most famous name on Earth. It is impossible to escape almost daily reminders of him in the Western world, from the churches we drive by to the year we write on our checks. As Dr. Crane so eloquently states in his introduction to *The Lost Books of the Bible,* "No man has ever appealed to the imagination of the world and so played upon its feelings as has Jesus of Nazareth."[1] About one-third of the human population today is identified as Christian.[2]

Who was he?

The simple answer is that Jesus was a man who preached in the Middle East over two thousand years ago. He was given the title "Christ" which means "messiah" (*i.e.,* "spiritual savior" or "liberator"), and so he is known today as Jesus the Christ, or simply Jesus Christ.

"Everything you need to know about Christ is in here," a Christian friend might tell us as he opens a book titled *Holy Bible.* "His teachings are spelled out on these pages. They are the way to spiritual salvation."

"What does the title mean?" we might ask.

"The word 'holy' means that it belongs to or comes from God. 'Bible' is from the Latin word *biblia,* meaning 'book.' *Holy Bible* therefore means a book from God. Christians believe that God had inspired the hundreds of men who had written, edited and translated all of the books, stories, and letters in the Bible at different times and places in history. This makes God the ultimate source of everything you read in the Bible."

"Why is it divided into two parts: Old Testament and New Testament?"

"'Testament' is another word for 'covenant' or 'pact.' Christians believe that God made two covenants, or testaments, with the human race. The first was through the Jews, and so we call it the Old Testament. The second was through Jesus Christ, and so we call it the New Testament.

"The Old Testament begins with the story of how God created the universe and humanity. Then it tells of God's relationship

with early humans, especially with the Jews. The New Testament picks up the story about two hundred years after the last events in the Old Testament. There we learn about the life of Jesus and the early Christians who shared his message with others."

"Do Christians believe in the same God as the Jews?"

"Yes. That is why Christians study the Old Testament which is really a collection of Jewish writings that are sometimes called the Hebrew Scriptures."

"Then why are Jews and Christians divided into separate religions?"

"Christians believe that Jesus was sent by God to fulfill the Old Testament predictions of a Messiah who would unite humanity into a single church. Traditional Jews do not believe that Christ was the promised Messiah, and so they do not follow the teachings of the New Testament."

Our friend has given us a good start by telling us that the story of Jesus really begins with the Jewish people.

Genesis is the first book of the Old Testament, and it reveals that Judaism began around the year 1,800 B.C. (plus or minus a century or two) with a man named Abram (a.k.a. Abraham) who lived in Haran—a major city in northwestern Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia was located where Iraq, eastern Syria and a small portion of southern Turkey are today.

According to *Genesis,* God commanded Abraham to rally his kin for a migration to Canaan (the "Promised Land"), a region which lay 350 miles away along the Mediterranean Sea where Israel is now. God promised Abraham that he would be the founder of a great nation there.

Abraham reached Canaan and established his new country as its First Patriarch (Founder and Ruler). Famine struck, and so he was forced to migrate to Egypt with about seventy other people. This proved to be a blessing in disguise because the Egyptians treated Abraham well, and he was able to return to Canaan years later with a great deal of wealth.

When Abraham died, his son Isaac became the Second Patriarch followed by his grandson Jacob as Patriarch #3. Jacob was given the name Israel, and the new nation in Canaan would even-

tually be named after him. (Much of the region would also become known as Judaea and Palestine.)

Jacob (a.k.a. Israel) grew into old age, at which time another famine coerced him and the family back to the land of the pyramids. Israel's descendants lived, worked, and multiplied in Egypt for the next four hundred years. The pharaohs eventually became alarmed at the growth of the Israeli tribes and forced them into slavery.

The Israelites resented their servitude, so they abandoned Egypt sometime between 1491 and 1446 B.C. (some say in the 1300's or late 1200's B.C.). They were led by a man named Moses after God inflicted a series of calamities on the Egyptians. The final calamity was a night called "the Passover" when God caused the death of every eldest son in Egypt.

After a period of wandering, the Israelites returned to the Promised Land (Canaan) where they conquered the people living there.

For the next five hundred years, the people of Israel lived as a strong and unified kingdom in the Promised Land. When King Solomon died *c.*930 B.C., their unity ended, and the country was divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah (from which came the words "Jew" and "Judaism") in the south.

Israel and Judah battled often during the next two centuries. Sometime between 715 and 724 B.C., Israel laid siege to Judah's capital of Jerusalem, and this caused Judah's king to beg for military assistance from the nearby Mesopotamian empire of Assyria. Assyria conquered Israel, but Judah paid a big price for this help by becoming Assyria's vassal state.

At that time, Israel was composed of ten tribes, and they became "lost" during the Assyrian occupation presumably due to intermingling with the Assyrians. Legends arose, however, that some tribes had fled and resettled elsewhere in the world. Efforts have been made throughout the centuries to learn the fate of the Ten Lost Tribes, and people claim to have traced them to the mountains of Africa, Asia, the Arabian peninsula, and even as far away as South America.

Less than two centuries later, another Mesopotamian empire (Babylonia) flexed its military muscle and invaded both Judah

and Israel. Judah ceased to exist, and many Jews were forced by their conquerors to live in Mesopotamia for nearly fifty years so they could not reunite to fight the Babylonian occupiers. This period is known as the Babylonian Captivity.

In 538 B.C., a new Babylonian ruler allowed the captives to return home, but Israel remained small and weak with Jerusalem as its center.

Historians tell us what happened next.

In 332 A.D., the Israelites were overrun by one of the most successful conquerors in history: Alexander the Great. His unified Greek army overran nearly all of the civilized world known to him. As a result, the Middle East—including Israel—became saturated with Hellenistic (Greek) culture, religion, and philosophy. Greek influences remained strong after the Jews revolted in 164 B.C. and regained their freedom.

The Israelites enjoyed independence for about the next hundred years, but a new empire was on the rise: Rome. Israel succumbed to Roman rule in 63 B.C. and was occupied for about a hundred years, during which time Jesus was born.

Two kinds of religious teachings were especially popular with Jews during the dark days of occupation: prophecy and apocalypse. "Prophecy" is a message from God or other divine source that is delivered by a human conduit (the "prophet"). "Apocalypse" is a divine revelation that often foretells the world's end.

The Israelites had four major prophets between 1050 B.C. and 853 B.C., but none of them bore messages of an apocalypse. That changed when the Jews became divided into two kingdoms. Starting around the year 750 B.C. and continuing for the next two hundred years, a series of Jewish prophets mesmerized their audiences with frightening end-of-the-world predictions. This two hundred-year period is called the Time of the Prophets, and the last eighteen books of the Old Testament (*Baruch* included) contain nothing but the words of those men. Here is but a tiny sample of what they had to say:

> Now the LORD [*i.e.*, God] is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants....

> The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the LORD has spoken his word.
>
> *Isaiah* 24:1, 3 (NRSV) (*c.* 701-681 B.C.)

> See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts,* so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, and healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts....
>
> Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.
>
> *Malachi* 4:1-3, 5 (NRSV) (455-433 B.C.)

The prophets were saying that God intends to destroy wicked people with horrible cataclysms in the future. God will only spare Jews, and only those Jews who repent their sins and follow God's commandments. Prior to God's awful day, He will send the prophet Elijah as a messenger. (Elijah was an Old Testament prophet who lived in the 9th century B.C.) Depending on one's interpretation, the returning Elijah would either reincarnate into another human body or appear in divine form.

Malachi's apocalypse is the very last book of the Old Testament and was written about four hundred years before Christ's birth. Widespread interest in *Malachi* and other apocalyptic prophets surged around 200 B.C. *The Catholic Study Bible* informs us, "Apocalyptic writing enjoyed its greatest popularity from 200 B.C. to 100 A.D., a time of distress and persecution for Jews, and later, for Christians."[3]

Many Jewish apocalypses contained a political message: God's Messiah-King would reestablish an independent Israel. That worried the Roman governors. A charismatic person proclaiming himself the Messiah could stir up real trouble against the Roman

* "Host" is another word for celestial body (*i.e.*, star or planet). It also means "angel."

occupiers.

Into this tense environment arrived the newborn Jesus.

Christ's life is told in the first four books of the New Testament. Each book is named after its presumed author: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books are called the "gospels"–a word derived from *god-spell* meaning "good news." The gospels are the "good news" of Jesus' life.

Matthew and *Luke* tell of Christ's infancy and childhood. He was born to a mother named Mary, but his was no normal birth. Mary was still a virgin when Jesus was conceived. Her husband Joseph was not even living with her at the time. An angel had impregnated her by divine means.

Joseph took the pregnant Mary to his hometown of Bethlehem. When the couple arrived, she went into labor and gave birth to Jesus, but not in her husband's home. The baby wound up in a manger (animal feeding trough). Shepherds were in nearby fields, and an angel appeared to them announcing, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David [*i.e.*, Bethlehem] a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (*Luke* 2:10-11, NRSV). Other angels sang praises.

Matthew alone contains the famous episode of wise men (magi) who followed a bright star (the Star of Bethlehem) to a house where the infant Jesus was living.* The magi believed that Christ's birth fulfilled prophet Micah's prediction made seven hundred years earlier:

> But you, O Bethlehem...
> from you shall come forth for me
> one who is to rule in Israel,

* Artists usually show three magi visiting Christ in a manger, but as *The NIV Study Bible* explains, "Contrary to tradition, the Magi did not visit Jesus at the manger on the night of his birth as did the shepherds. They came some months later and visited him as a 'child' in his house."[4] *Matthew* does not reveal the number of magi. The tradition of three came from outside the Bible and might be based on the Gospels saying that the wise men brought three different types of gifts.

whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days...
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the
strength of the LORD
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they [the Israelites] shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.
Micah 5:2, 4 (NRSV)

According to *Matthew,* baby Jesus' life was threatened by Jewish King Herod the Great who ruled with Roman support from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. Herod was keenly aware of the Jewish apocalypses and was told that the Messiah had already been born in Bethlehem. Herod ordered soldiers to slaughter all boys in the town aged two and younger in the hope that one of them would be the young Jesus. Herod was unsuccessful because Christ's father had learned of the danger from an angel who advised him in a dream to take his child and wife to Egypt.

Christ's family remained in the land of the pyramids until Herod died a short while later, at which time an angel gave Joseph the "all clear" to return home. Herod's son, however, emerged as another risk to Jesus' well-being, so an angel advised Joseph to take the family to Mary's hometown of Nazareth. At that time, Jesus was no more than two or three years old. *Matthew* reveals nothing further about Christ's childhood.

Luke, on the other hand, says nothing about the magi, the threat from King Herod, or that Joseph fled with his family to Egypt. Instead, *Luke* claims that young Christ was circumcised eight days after birth. About a month later, he was taken by his parents to Bethlehem for a purification ceremony where a man named Simeon and the prophetess Anna announced that the infant was God's Redeemer. *Luke* 2:39-40 continues, "When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the [Jewish] Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." (NIV). *Luke* offers no other stories about Jesus' childhood except a single event when Christ was twelve:

His parents had taken him to the annual Passover Feast in Jerusalem but accidentally left him behind when they joined a caravan to return home. They went back to Jerusalem, and after three days of searching, they discovered their son in conversation with Jewish teachers who were amazed at the young man's wisdom.

Luke concludes the story of Jesus' youth with the words, "He went down with them [*i.e.,* his parents] and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man." (*Luke* 2:51-52, NAB).

All four gospels describe Christ's adult years. The basic story is that he began preaching at about age 30, but it is uncertain how long the ministry lasted. Some people say only four months, but most others give an estimate of three to four years.

Jesus' religious crusade was launched by a relative known as John the Baptist. (John's mother Elizabeth was a cousin of Jesus' mother Mary). John had also been miraculously born of a virgin, and as an adult he preached in the Judaean desert east of Palestine.

John was an odd man who subsisted on an unappealing diet of locusts and wild honey. His specialty was baptizing people in the Jordan River to wash away their sins so that they would be forgiven by God, hence his moniker "the Baptist." John announced to his followers that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by prophet Isaiah seven hundred years earlier with these words:

In the desert prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the wilderness
a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the LORD will be
revealed,
and all mankind together will see it.
Isaiah 40:3-5 (NIV)

Jesus conducted his early preaching near the Sea of Galilee, but he would later travel seventy miles south to Jerusalem on two occasions—the second resulted in his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus attracted many followers, and turnouts for some of his sermons numbered in the thousands. He picked a dozen loyal men (the Twelve Apostles) to be his innermost circle, and another seventy or seventy-two lesser disciples to help with organizational work.

Christ taught many things about God and the way to salvation. He was especially fond of teaching in parables, *i.e.,* stories that convey a message. His spiritual message emphasized the importance of spirit over body:

> Flesh can give birth only to flesh; it is spirit that gives birth to spirit.
>
> *John* 3:6 (REB)

> It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.
>
> *John* 6:63 (NRSV)

Jesus preached a message of immortality: "...everyone who has faith in him [*i.e.,* Jesus] may not perish but have eternal life." (*John* 3:16, REB). Christ further said, "In very truth I tell you, if anyone obeys my teaching he will never see death." (*John* 8:51, REB). Some people interpret these words to mean that Jesus was preaching a path to physical immortality. Others believe that he was promising spiritual immortality apart from the body.

Jesus called himself the "bread of life"—a source of spiritual nourishment that will lead to eternal life. He further stressed that physical possessions are impermanent but salvation lasts forever: "Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life." (*John* 6:27, NJB) He even recommended that his followers liquidate their belongings:

> Sell your possessions and give to charity. Provide for yourselves purses that do not wear out, and never-failing treasure in heaven, where no thief can get near it, no moth destroy it.
>
> *Luke* 12:33 (REB)

According to Christ, being ethical is an important step to salvation for a very simple reason: "Wrongdoers hate the light [*i.e.,* the truth which leads to salvation] and avoid it, for fear their misdeeds should be exposed." (*John* 3:20, REB). Christ's path to salvation included another step, namely he would teach hidden knowledge: "I will utter things kept secret since the world was made." (*Matthew* 13:35, REB).

According to *Matthew,* Christ preached an apocalypse:

> Nation will arise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains [of God's kingdom on Earth]...
>
> Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.
>
> And this gospel of the kingdom [of God] will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."
>
> *Matthew* 24:7-8, 12-14 (NIV)

Jesus had another claim to fame: he could miraculously cure people of major illnesses and disabilities by simply touching them or stating that they would be well. He drove demons out of the insane and even brought dead people back to life.

Not everyone was impressed. Influential Jewish leaders accused him of being a false teacher. Christ was arrested in Jerusalem and forced to stand trial before a Roman authority who found him innocent. Many Jews nevertheless demanded Christ's death. The Romans relented, and they nailed him to a cross.*

---

* The claim that Jews were responsible for Christ's execution has justified fearsome waves of anti-Semitism over the centuries. The controversy re-emerged in 2004 when film actor/producer Mel Gibson released his hit movie *The Passion of the Christ*—a fictionalized and violent retelling of the last hours of Christ's life as described in the Gospels (with some artistic license). As will be discussed later in this book, most historians, and even many Christians, think that Rome was mostly to blame.

The New Testament says that Christ died on the cross, but that merely set the stage for his greatest miracle. After hanging on the crucifix for a number of hours, his corpse was removed and taken to a tomb where it was prepared for burial. It was then left alone for two days.

Each gospel gives a slightly different account of what happened next, but the essence is the same. When Christ's tomb was inspected on the third day, the body was gone. For the next forty days, Jesus appeared eleven times to various followers to announce that he had been miraculously resurrected from death. Finally, the Apostles witnessed him being taken up into heaven. This inspired some of them to travel far and wide to preach the Good News of their Messiah who had risen from death. They were joined by a man named Paul whose influence would eventually overshadow theirs.

Paul says that his association with Christianity began as a hatemonger who had never met the mortal Christ. He was zealously persecuting Christians three years after the crucifixion. One day he traveled down a road to continue his mischief when he experienced a miraculous vision of Christ. Paul was instantly converted, although he waited another dozen or so years to start evangelizing. Paul became known as Apostle Paul, and a substantial portion of the New Testament is filled with his writings and the story of his activities. Paul's adventures were dramatic with miraculous healings, arrests, a narrow escape from death, and attempts to prevent the new church from splintering apart. His New Testament letters establish much of the theology that Christians still follow today. Whenever a Paul is mentioned in the chapters to follow, it is this Apostle Paul.

The Biblical story of Jesus remains a source of inspiration for billions of people. Christians say it holds the solution to salvation which is achieved by embracing the miracle of Christ's resurrection, and believing that his terrible suffering and crucifixion can atone for other people's sins. Salvation is available to everyone through heartfelt belief, acceptance, and prayer. The New Testament comforts us by saying that Jesus now sits at the right hand of God, and many Christians pray for him to intervene in their daily

lives. It is a faith that has survived the test of time and the attacks of many adversaries.

Arrival

"Good morning, Boss."

"How's everything, Sandy?" the agent replied to his secretary as he strode past her desk. "Did you and Tom catch that screening last night?"

"No, March Records called him. The Hex Guns cancelled their evening session, so they wanted Tom to lay another track. I'm turning into a rock musician's widow."

Sandy was an attractive woman in her mid-twenties, and an outstanding secretary. She had caught the eye of GTA's top punk rocker client, Tom Spee, and romance flowered. Tom was a normal twenty-four-year-old who was blessed with a good musical ear and sense of showmanship.

"Hon, clear my calendar for the day. I have a hunch that I might be spending the whole day with Doris' new find from New York."

"What about your lunch with Jim Costello at New Vision? They plan to start lensing *Cape Canaveral* next month."

"Oh, that's right. Talk about unrealistic! He still wants Julia to co-star, but I told him she won't do it. I wish he'd taken Katie like I suggested, but now she's booked. Ask Doris to lunch with him when she gets here. Costello likes her and will listen."

"I'll let him know."

Orion felt distracted as he began negotiating another of his usual multimillion dollar deals. Offers, contracts, and demands flowed in and out of his hands by way of faxes, e-mails, and overnight express, but they were not pumping his adrenaline today. Everything seemed to be a petty annoyance as he waited for 11 a.m.

A glance at his watch told him that it was 10:23. Where was Doris with their client-to-be? Probably on Wilshire Boulevard.

10:38 a.m. No doubt they were about to reach the parking garage.

10:42 a.m.

(Buzz!)

"Yes, Sandy...Put her on...Doris! Where are you?...Why did he want to talk to a wino?...No, don't say that to him...Doris, do me a favor. Don't drive along any streets with people holding signs saying, 'Will work for food.' I don't want him bringing any lunch guests."

Orion picked up a forty-page television contract sent to him by a new hotshot entertainment attorney whose idea of good lawyering meant dumping every word of boilerplate into a contract that a word processor could hold.

(Buzz!)

Orion looked at his Rolex. 11:18 a.m.

"Yes, Sandy...Show our guest in."

Orion smoothed his hair and noticed that his hands were trembling. *Amazing!* he thought. *I've calmly faced the heads of huge multinational corporations, Presidents, Prime Ministers, and some of the most fearsome egos on Earth, but now I'm falling apart at the thought of meeting a man famous for his gentleness.*

The office door opened slightly. Sandy poked her head in and boldly stepped forward. She was starry-eyed.

"Mr. Shaw," she smiled, "this is Mr. Christ to see you."

Orion was surprised, but not displeased, at the man who walked in. He stood about six feet in height, was boyishly handsome, clean-shaven, and well-proportioned. He seemed to be in his early thirties, but it was difficult to tell. As the man stepped forward to shake hands, Orion could see that he had a flawless complexion. The eyes were an unusual auburn color with the slightest hint of gold. What was his ethnic background? Was he a tanned Caucasian? Or a light-skinned black or Mediterranean? Something about his cheekbones suggested possible Asian blood. His head was capped by soft wavy dark hair, bordering on curly.

The clothes were also a surprise. This "Mr. Christ" was wearing a simple cotton-polyester shirt, and his slacks were inexpensive white casuals. He was certainly clean and presentable, but the modesty of his dress made Orion feel self-conscious about his own clothing which cost at least twenty times the apparel of his guest. For the first time, Orion was embarrassed by the expensive watch on his wrist.

"Thank you for your gracious invitation to visit with you," the guest said as he accepted Orion's outstretched hand. His English contained the slightest hint of an accent that Orion could not place. The man's smile was as dazzling as the intelligence that sparkled in his eyes, and his humility seemed genuine. The handshake was warm and firm.

"The pleasure is mine, uh, Mr. Christ. Please have a seat."

Orion ushered his prospective client to a circle of plush chairs.

"Please," the guest replied as they sat down, "call me Joe."

"Joe?" Orion puzzled.

"Yes, that is my nickname. I prefer it."

"Well, Joe, may I get you some coffee or a drink? I have a terrific little red wine that I think you would enjoy."

"I have no thirst, but please, refresh yourself in any manner that suits you."

"I'm fine, too. We'll do lunch at a marvelous place I know."

"You and your associates are showing me boundless hospitality. Certainly I would be pleased to share the noon meal with you."

Orion sat down and paused a moment to gather his thoughts.

"So, tell me," Orion continued, "I understand that you're here to start your Second Coming."

"Indeed. I will be glad to finally get it done."

"What's your timetable?"

"I begin in earnest on Monday. I have been doing the preliminaries for the past few weeks."

Joe was certainly a pleasant fellow, but Orion could not afford to waste an entire day if his visitor proved to be nothing more than a likeable looney. *I'll just have to take the plunge,* Orion decided.

"Now, Joe. Please don't take offense, because I can see that you are a considerate person, but there's a voice in me that says, 'Show me the proof.' People have been preaching Christ's Second Coming for centuries. I can't claim to be a Bible scholar, but I seem to remember that there are supposed to be heavenly signs to announce it. I haven't noticed any."

"Hmm," Joe responded playfully, "If I remember the Bible correctly, someone once quoted me as saying, '...the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'"

"Alright. Fair enough. You're showing me that you know your Bible. But look, Joe, is there anything you can say or do to prove to me that you really are Jesus Christ?"

Joe shrugged. "Can anyone prove that a man known as Jesus Christ ever lived at all?"

Chapter 3

Jesus: A Man Who Never Was

"SCHOLARLY BOOKLET PROVES *JESUS NEVER EXISTED!* Conclusive proof Flavius Josephus created fictional Jesus, authored Gospels. AMAZING but *ABSOLUTELY INCONTROVERTIBLE!* Send $5...."

Advertisement in *The Humanist* magazine[1]

At first blush, it seems incredible that any rational person would argue against Christ's existence. After all, how could a mythical person inspire such devotion for two millennia? We are nevertheless faced with statements like the one made by the president of American Atheists:

> There was no such person in the history of the world as Jesus Christ. There was no historical, living, breathing, sentient human being by that name. Ever. The myth is good for business.[2]

Skeptics claim that Jesus was a fictional character woven into real events, not unlike the American movie *Forrest Gump*. Through clever screenwriting and special effects, the likeable but fictitious Gump talks with real American presidents and participates in true events like the Vietnam War. Was Jesus Christ the Forrest Gump of first-century Palestine?

The New Testament gospels were not written until decades after Jesus reportedly lived. He was supposedly crucified around the year A.D. 30, but Bible scholars have concluded that all four Gospels were written a minimum of two decades later: *Matthew* and *Mark* sometime between A.D. 50 and the 70's, *Luke* anywhere between A.D. 59 and the 80's, and *John* as late as A.D. 85 or thereafter (although some scholars place *John* between the A.D. 50's and 70).*

* In his book *Paul, The Mind of the Apostle* A.N. Wilson makes a good argument that the first three gospels—*Matthew, Mark,* and *Luke*—were all written *c.* A.D. 62 and before. *Acts of the Apostles* ("*Acts,*" for short, which tells the story of the Christian evangelists who preached after Christ's crucifixion) was almost certainly a continuation of the *Gospel of Luke, i.e., Luke* and *Acts* were a single writing that scholars call *Luke-Acts*. *Acts* ends with Paul living in Rome *c.* A.D. 62, which means that *Luke-Acts* was probably completed just about that time, otherwise Paul's later activities would have been included. Since *Mark* and *Matthew* were probably written before *Luke-Acts*, they would have been authored before A.D. 62.

Why would people wait decades to write about a man as miraculous and popular as Jesus Christ?

Another fact fueling the skeptic flame is that the first three gospels—namely *Matthew, Mark,* and *Luke*—are so similar that they are called the Synoptic Gospels. "Synoptic" comes from the Greek word *synoptikòs* which means "seeing together." The Synoptic Gospels mirror one another to a startling degree—even down to exact wording in some places. The *NIV Study Bible* tells us:

> A careful comparison of the four Gospels reveals that Matthew, Mark and Luke are noticeably similar, while John is quite different. The first three Gospels agree extensively in language, in the material they include, and in the order in which events and sayings from the life of Christ are recorded. (Chronological order does not appear to have been rigidly followed in any of the Gospels, however).[3]

Matthew contains 91% of what is told in *Mark,* and *Luke* contains 53%. Many scholars therefore believe that *Mark* was the basis for *Matthew* and *Luke.* The implication is that the four gospels only had two primary sources: one for the three Synoptic Gospels (plus additional secondary sources) and another for *John.*

Were the gospel authors personal friends of Christ? Are they telling us their personal experiences?

Mark and *Luke* were not named after any of the Twelve Apostles. There is an early Catholic tradition that the writer of *Mark* was the naked youth who fled the garden when Jesus was arrested by Roman soldiers. (See *Mark* 14:51-52.) If true, this would mean that *Mark's* author was personally acquainted with Christ even if he was not one of the Twelve Apostles. Most Bible scholars doubt

this identification and believe that *Mark*'s author was a man named John Mark who had never met Christ. (More about John Mark later.) As for *Luke,* the author admits that he had never met Christ, and all of his information came from outside sources:

> Many writers have undertaken to draw up an account of the events that have taken place among us [Christians], following the traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and servants of the gospel. So I in my turn, as one who has investigated the whole course of these events in detail, have decided to write an orderly narrative for you...
>
> *Luke* 1:1-3 (NAB)

That leaves *Matthew* and *John* as the only two gospels penned under the names of actual Apostles.

Although many Christians think that *Matthew* was authored by Apostle Matthew, *The Catholic Study Bible* points out that this belief has been challenged for good reason:

> The ancient tradition that the author was the disciple and apostle of Jesus named Matthew...is untenable because the gospel is based, in large part, on the Gospel according to Mark (almost all the verses of that gospel have been utilized in this), and it is hardly likely that a companion of Jesus would have followed so extensively an account that came from one who admittedly never had such an association rather than rely on his own memories. The attribution of the gospel to the disciple Matthew may have been due to his having been responsible for some of the traditions found in it, but that is far from certain.[4]

Some scholars believe that a true eyewitness wrote *John*, but later editors tampered with it and transformed the gospel into a mishmash of fact and fiction. *The Catholic Study Bible* comments, "Critical analysis makes it difficult to accept the idea that the gospel as it now stands was written by one person."[5] Furthermore, the author of *John* states that he relied on an unnamed "Beloved Disciple" for his data: "It is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true."

(*John* 21:24, NAB). Was Apostle John simply being modest and writing about himself in the third person as many people believe? Early Christian traditions say that he was the Beloved Disciple, but *John's* statement "and we know that his testimony is true" would have been unusual for a man to say if he was trying to be modest.

Some scholars believe that *John* was originally written, edited, and/or published by a man in Ephesus known as Presbyter John. Presbyter John disseminated Christianity decades after the crucifixion in the company of one of Jesus' alleged "lesser disciples," Aristion. A misidentification of Presbyter John with Apostle John appears to have started with church father Irenaeus *c.*A.D. 180-190. If Presbyter John wrote the *Gospel of John*, then he seems to have based his information on the testimony of a single person, namely the mysterious Beloved Disciple who was probably not Presbyter John's friend Aristion. (The identity of the Beloved Disciple will be explored in chapter 17.)

More doubts about gospel authorship are raised when we consider that the gospels were not given names until long after they appeared. Jesus skeptic Professor G.A. Wells points out:

> Their present titles ("according to Matthew," etc.) are not part of the originals; for written gospels were long alluded to and even quoted without any mention of titles, without being ascribed to named authors.[6]

The first known person to mention a gospel by name was Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor *c.*A.D. 140, who wrote about *Matthew* and *Mark*. Even this titling was not universally-known at the time: around A.D. 150, Christian apologist Justin Martyr did not name the gospels or say how many existed even though he was familiar with them. The first known individual to state that there were four true gospels bearing the names "Matthew," "Mark," "Luke," and "John" was Irenaeus *c.*A.D. 180-190, which was more than a century after they were written. For these reasons, Bible critics declare that the gospel titles are, at best, "second-century guesses."

The gospels were written with the aim of attracting people to a religion already being spread by Christian leaders. The stories

were never intended as objective biographies about a Judaean named Jesus. The author of *John* openly declared his desire to make converts: "These [miraculous events performed by Jesus] are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name." (*John* 20:31, NJB). *The NIV Study Bible* adds, "Matthew's main purpose is to prove to his Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah."[7] *Luke* reveals its evangelistic intent in the first chapter: "...it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus*, so that you may know the certainty of the things [about Jesus] you have been taught." (*Luke* 1:4, NAB).

Who wrote the gospels? If Jesus was a fiction, who invented him?

Most fingers point to Paul and his circle of friends.

Thirteen or more of the New Testament letters were penned by Paul as he traveled and preached. He makes it clear that he is the man with the true message:

> Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news [of Jesus's miraculous resurrection] that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you....
>
> *1 Corinthians* 15:1-2 (NRSV)

Was Paul the inventor of Christianity? Did he dream up "Jesus Christ" as an allegory? Some debunkers think so, and they point to a widely-agreed fact to support their position:

Paul's writings appeared in history before the gospels.

Paul was already preaching and writing his Christian message before the story of Jesus' life was put to paper. It appears that everyone who wrote the four New Testament gospels were associates of Paul.

Mark is widely believed to be the first-written of the three Synoptic Gospels. It was most likely authored by "John, also called

* Theophilus means "one who loves God," and he is thought to be an actual person for whom Luke prepared his gospel.

Mark" (a.k.a. John Mark) (*Acts* 12:12, NIV), and this was stated as fact by Christian author Papias *c.*A.D. 140. Paul reports that John Mark was a personal friend. (*Colossians* 4:10, *Philemon* 24).

Luke—author of the gospel bearing his name—was also a companion of Paul. Luke uses the plural "we" several times when narrating Paul's adventures. (*Acts* 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, and 27:1-28). Paul himself mentions his "dear friend Luke, the doctor." (*Colossians* 4:14, *2 Timothy* 4:11, and *Philemon* 24).* Did Luke base his gospel on Paul's teachings? Irenaeus thought so when he wrote, "Luke, also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel preached by him." (*Canon,* p. 121.)

In regard to *Matthew,* the best guess is that Apostle Matthew's name was falsely assigned to this gospel to give it authority. Christian forgeries—false names put on writings that might contain true facts—have been created for millennia, but they were especially common during the first few centuries A.D. Christians at that time were locked in an intense ideological war about the most basic questions: What did Christ really teach? What must a person do to attain salvation? Christians debated and maligned each other for about three hundred years to arrive at the orthodoxy we know today. To win this war, writers from all camps wrote gospels and epistles (letters) based on the traditions and teachings they believed to be true, but wrote under the names of Apostles and other Christ-connected people. In other instances, the writings were innocently labeled with famous names to reflect traditions or teachings associ-

* In *Who Wrote the Gospels?,* Professor Randel Helms theorizes that the author of *Luke* was a woman. *Luke* gives women a more important role in Jesus' ministry than do the other gospels. *Luke* is also more sensitive to the inner feelings of the female characters and expresses a feminine perspective at times. On the other hand, Paul is quoted as saying, "...women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission...it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." (*1 Corinthians* 14:34, NIV.) There is, however, good scholarship that this anti-woman statement was not actually written by Paul but was inserted by a later scribe or translator. (See *Lost Christianities* by Bart Ehrman.) If *Luke's* author was a doctor, then that person was mostly likely a male since doctors in that patriarchal era were invariably men.

ated with the names. Most forgers did not invent their stories or theology, but they assembled oral and written traditions that were already embraced by whatever Christian group they happened to belong to. Christian forgeries therefore have value to historians as sources of facts and teachings, but they give skeptics plenty of ammunition to say that early Christian literature was an agenda-pandering and deceit-filled collection of writings.

Does this mean that Paul was the originator of a Christ myth?

Not necessarily. Paul had a friend named Peter.

Peter is said to be one of Jesus' Twelve Apostles and was one of the first to begin spreading the gospel after Christ was gone. Peter allowed Paul to become part of this effort. According to Christian authorities cited by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History,* John Mark (the presumed author of *Mark*) went with Peter to Rome where John Mark acted as Peter's secretary. John Mark was persuaded by devout Christians to write the story of Christ as told by Peter. That writing became the *Gospel of Mark*. If *Mark* was truly based on the direct testimony of Jesus' handpicked successor Peter, it would have made sense for the authors of *Matthew* and *Luke* to use *Mark* as the foundation for their own gospels. Another early tradition relayed by Dorotheus, bishop of Tyrus (*d.* 366) states that Luke was also personally acquainted with Peter and wrote his gospel according to what Peter had to say. This would mean that Peter was the primary source of the three Synoptic Gospels.

What about Peter himself? Did he write his own gospel? Maybe. A *Gospel of Peter* does exist (and it will be quoted later in this book), but it was excluded from the official Bible. Only a fragment of *Peter* survives, and many scholars believe it to be a forgery. It deals with the crucifixion and is similar to *Mark*. The editors of *The Complete Gospels* indicate that "original stage" *Peter* may be the earliest crucifixion ("passion") story in the gospel tradition, and *Peter* could have been the source for all subsequent passion stories, including the one in *Mark*. This would mean that *Peter* was written before the New Testament gospels. Although *Peter* was a favorite with many early Christians, it fell into disfavor when some of its spiritual teachings were later declared heresies. None of this, of course, means that Peter actually knew a "Jesus Christ." He may

have invented the story and found willing accomplices or dupes in the persons of Paul, Luke, John Mark, and others.

We seem to have solved the riddle of who put the New Testament gospels to paper. They were all Christian evangelists who had never met Christ. They based most of their stories on the say-so of two people: Peter and the anonymous "Beloved Disciple."

Some scholars believe that gospel teachings were largely derived from a collection of Jesus' sayings that are now lost to history. This hypothetical "lost Gospel" is called the "Gospel of Q." "Q" stands for "Quelle," which means "source" in German. If this "source gospel" really existed, it could have been written by Paul or anyone in his circle.

People who conspire to tell an elaborate lie will usually stumble on the details. The New Testament gospels are rife with factual contradictions. In *The Christ, A Critical Analysis of the Evidence of His Existence,* John E. Remsburg devotes more than 280 pages to cataloging them. Here are just four:

1. *Matthew* 2:1 states that Jesus was born "in the days of King Herod," but *Luke* 2:1-7 says, "when Quirinius [Cyrenius] was governor of Syria." Herod died in 4 B.C., but Quirinius did not become governor of Syria until at least ten years later in A.D. 6 or 7. That is a minimum ten-year discrepancy.

2. In order for Jesus to satisfy the Jewish prophecies, he needed be a descendant of Jewish King David. *Matthew* and *Luke* try to prove this lineage by naming the generations from David to Jesus. *Matthew* 1:6-16 names twenty-eight generations, but *Luke* 3:23-31 names forty-three. Some Christians explain this contradiction by saying that *Matthew's* genealogy concerns legal succession while *Luke* traces the actual bloodline. This argument is easily rejected because *Matthew* uses the word "begat" (or "fathered"), and this means an actual bloodline.

3. In *Matthew* 2:13-15, Mary and Joseph flee with baby Jesus to Egypt. *Luke* 2:22-52, on the other hand, maintains that Jesus and family remained in Palestine. Skeptics view *Matthew's* story about Egypt as a crude attempt to make the life of Christ fit *Hosea* 11:1 from the Old Testament: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." (NRSV). The author of *Matthew* seems to misunderstand *Hosea's* words by thinking that it is a pre-

diction of a future event when, in fact, *Hosea* 11:1 is discussing the exodus of Israelites out of Egypt centuries earlier. *Hosea* 11:1 has nothing to do with the Messiah because the word "son" in this passage means the nation of Israel, not God's son. (See discussion in *The Catholic Study Bible,* p. 1118 Old Testament). In other words, *Matthew* misinterprets *Hosea,* and then seems to invent a story about Jesus to fit the misinterpretation.

4. All New Testament gospels state that Jesus lived in a town called Nazareth. Because of that, *Matthew* 2:23 proclaims that Jesus fulfilled an Old Testament prediction that the Messiah would be called a "Nazarene" (or "Nasorean"). Bible scholars point out that *Matthew* is confused about the word "Nazarene." It has nothing to do with the town of Nazareth. The writer must have misinterpreted one of these two Old Testament passages:

A. *Judges* 13:5 (REB): "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor must touch his head, for the boy is to be a Nazarite, consecrated to God from birth." This sentence refers to Samson of the Old Testament, not the future Messiah. Samson is the Biblical character who lost his superhuman strength when his hair was cut. "Nazarite" in this story means "devoted one" or "consecrated." It has nothing to do with the town of Nazareth.

B. *Isaiah* 11:1 (NAB): "But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud [*i.e., ne-ser*] shall blossom." This refers to the future Messiah who will be the *ne-ser* (*i.e.,* "bud," meaning future descendant) of Jesse, who was the father of King David. The word *ne-ser* (sometimes translated as *netzer* ("branch")) might explain the origin of the word "Nazarene" *(notzri*). If Jesus was called "the Nazarene," it was because he was a "branch" (*i.e., netzer, notzri*) of the family tree of Jesse and King David. The title had nothing to do with the municipality of Nazareth. As we will discuss in chapter 9, "Nazarene" might also be based on a root word meaning "truth," and it was the name of a sect to which Jesus may have belonged. Again, there is no connection to the town of Nazareth.

Alright, we might concede, *the New Testament alone does not prove the existence of Christ. Did his friends or early followers leave any other writings?*

There are many more gospels and epistles about Christ than those found in the New Testament, but they were not accepted by the mainstream churches. Those rejected works are known as "apocrypha," which comes from the Greek word *apokryphos* meaning "hidden writings." The Christian apocrypha are not actually hidden and are widely published and studied. What they have in common is their exclusion from the Bible, sometimes for good reasons and sometime not. Over a hundred Christian apocryphal writings and fragments have survived and can be read today. Most purport to be true stories (gospels) about Christ, tales about the Apostles (called "Acts," *e.g., Acts of Peter, Acts of John*), and epistles supposedly written by the Apostles, people close to them, or even by Jesus himself. Another fifty or so apocryphal writings are known to have existed but are now lost to history.

Do the Christian apocrypha prove that Jesus really lived?

Unfortunately, no. Nearly every Apostle supposedly wrote his own gospel, even the treacherous Judas Iscariot, but the authorship for those works cannot be authenticated. Only three known apocryphal gospels have a reasonable chance of being written prior to the New Testament gospels, namely the *Gospel of Peter,* the *Gospel of Thomas,* and the *Gospel of Mary.* The rest of them were clearly authored afterwards, sometimes a century or more, and too frequently they merely embellish the New Testament stories. Some apocryphal writings are so farfetched that they could only have been intended as charming religious fairy tales.

Did Christ himself write anything?

Church fathers St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) and St. Jerome (*c.*A.D. 347-*c.* 420) both state that Jesus had left nothing in writing. Nevertheless, we do encounter several letters that purport to have come from Christ's own hand, but they are widely regarded as fabrications:

1. *The letter of Christ to Agbarus.* During Christ's time, a prince named Agbarus (a.k.a. Agbar) lived in the city of Edessa (which is today called Urfa in southern Turkey). Agbarus wrote to Jesus with a request to be healed and to offer protection from Jewish persecution. This was Christ's complete reply:

> Blessed are you, O Agbarus, who, without seeing, has believed in me. For it is written concerning me, that they who have seen me will not believe, that they who have not seen, may believe and live. But in regard to what you have written, that I should come to you, it is necessary that I should fulfill all things here, for which I have been sent. And after this fulfillment, thus to be received again by God that sent me. And after I have been received up, I will send to you a certain one of my disciples, that he may heal your affliction, and give life to you and to those who are with you.[8]

The Jesus-Agbar correspondence was not published until the fourth century A.D. by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Eusebius claims that he discovered the letters after they had been stored for centuries in the Edessa archives. One clue that this letter is fake is the statement, "...for it is written concerning me..." As far as historians can tell, nothing was written about Jesus until after he died.

2. *Letter of Jesus on Sunday observance.* This apocryphal letter was popular amongst Irish Christians. It purports to be an epistle written by Christ in heaven after he ascended, and then it was carried to the altar of Peter in Rome by angels. This is not even a letter that was supposedly written by Christ when he lived on Earth.

3. *Letter of Christ to Peter and Paul.* The text of this letter has been lost to history. We only know of it because it was mentioned by at least one church writer within four hundred years of Christ's death. Since Paul did not convert to Christianity until after the crucifixion, the title of the document suggests that it was another missive supposedly written by Jesus after his Ascension*.

4. *Epistle of Christ, produced by the Manicheans.* The Manicheans were a heretical sect of Christians that arose during the 200's A.D. and survived until at least the 17th century. This letter may have been penned by Mani, the Manichean's prolific founder.

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* A later chapter will discuss the theory that Jesus survived the crucifixion and continued to preach. If this is true, then Jesus might have written letters during that time, including to Peter and Paul, but no such epistles can be authenticated.

5. *Letter of Jesus to his mother.* In *The Mystical Life of Jesus*, H. Spencer Lewis quotes an entire condolence letter that Jesus allegedly wrote to his mother on the occasion of father Joseph's death. Jesus was in his teens and studying in India at the time. Lewis claims that several translations of the letter existed and that Christ made other writings over the years that were "carefully preserved and recorded."[9] Unfortunately, the reality of the source texts cannot be confirmed.

6. *The Last Will and Testament of Jesus.* In the northern Japanese village of Shingo (formerly Herai), there is a curious tourist attraction that purports to contain the actual grave of Christ. A small museum at the site displays text from ancient Japanese scrolls that were supposedly written or dictated by Jesus himself. The scrolls tell how he survived the crucifixion and traveled to Japan. (More about this in chapter 18.) Most scholars doubt the authenticity of this Last Will because the original scrolls were allegedly discovered in 1935 but destroyed during World War II, so there is no way to prove that the original scrolls ever existed.

7. Writings called *The Books of the Saviour, The Gospel of the Savior,* and the *Books of Jeu* give the impression from their titles that they were written by Christ, but they are in fact written in the third person.

Jesus' mother Mary supposedly wrote at least three letters. One was to Ignatius Martyr in which she preaches faith and courage, and Ignatius responds. In another, Mary exhorts the inhabitants of Messina to faith. Her epistle to the Florentines is barely four lines in length, but it was not revealed until a sermon given on October 25, 1495. The Catholic Church does not regard any of these Mary letters as authentic.

What about other eyewitnesses, such as people in the crowds who heard Jesus speak? Did they write anything? Are there any official records, like routine birth or arrest entries?

Not a single written word has reached us from the thousands of people who allegedly went to see Christ preach. (Perhaps this is not surprising even if Jesus did exist since the vast majority of people in his day were illiterate.) In his *First Apology* (c.A.D. 150), Church writer Justin twice mentions the existence of official documents related to Christ's trial before Pilate, but Justin did not

provide enough details to support his claim. Perhaps he only assumed they existed. That leaves us with a handful of apocryphal letters supposedly written by Roman and Jewish officials, but they are widely deemed to be forgeries:

1. *Letter of Pilate to Claudius* was allegedly written by Pilate (the local Roman ruler who tried Christ) to emperor Claudius (*r.*A.D. 41-54). The epistle is about a page in length and is found in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter and Paul.* Pilate blames the Jews for the crucifixion, and he accepts the truth of Jesus' miracles and resurrection. Pilate accuses Jews of trying to pay Roman soldiers to say that Christ's followers had stolen the body from the tomb with the intent to foist a resurrection hoax on the public. This letter seems to have been unknown to the earliest Christian apologists.

2. *Letter of Pilate to Augustus.* Pilate describes miracles that Christ performed while he was alive. The resurrection brought with it a variety of supernatural events, including an earthquake that swallowed up Jews. This letter cannot be traced further back than the sixth or seventh century.

3. *Correspondence between Pilate and Emperor Tiberius* consists of three letters: (a) The *Report (or "Relation") of Pilate to Tiberius* (a.k.a. *Anaphora* or "Pilate's Report"), (b) a letter from Pilate to Tiberius (*Epistle of Pilate*), and (c) a reply from Tiberius. This trio of Pilate-Tiberius writings was mentioned as early as *c.*A.D. 200 by Tertullian in his *Apologeticus.* Pilate's Report contains a summary of Christ's miracles and the strange phenomena that occurred during the crucifixion and resurrection. Despite a few intriguing passages (which will be quoted in a later chapter), the Report contains apparent exaggerations such as a statement that an earthquake caused all but one synagogue in Jerusalem to fall into ruin—an event not mentioned in any histories or chronicles from the times. Pilate expresses remorse for his role in Christ's death. In reply, Tiberius reports that Mary Magdelene had visited him.

4. *Correspondence between Pilate and Herod.* Guilt-ridden Pilate could not stop writing. An exchange of letters supposedly occurred between him and Herod Antipas. It is unclear who wrote first, but both men expressed great sorrow for their involvement in the punishment of Christ. Pilate said that his wife Procla had accompanied Longinus (the Roman centurion who pierced Christ's side with a spear) and other soldiers to a place where they spied the resurrected Christ preaching in a field. Sound and thunder came from heaven along with an earthquake that emitted sweet odor. Herod believed that he was being divinely punished when his daughter was accidentally beheaded as she fell through some ice in a pool. These letters can be traced to a sixth or seventh century manuscript preserved in the British Museum, but no earlier.

5. *Correspondence between Herod and Theodorus.* Only two short excerpts or paraphrases exist. A man named Theodorus is critical of the official actions that led to Christ's crucifixion. Herod responds in his own defense.

6. *Letter of Pubulus Lentulus.* Lentulus was supposedly a governor of Judaea before Pilate. The letter attributed to him was first published in Cologne in 1474 in the work *Life of Christ* by Ludolph the Carthusian, and reprinted less than two decades later in the *Introduction to the works of St. Anselm* (Nuremburg, 1491). The text of the letter was said to be part of an ancient Roman document that was sent from Constantinople to Rome. The most remarkable aspect of the letter is Lentulus' detailed physical description of Christ. (See chapter 15 for the text.) Alas, even the *Catholic Encyclopedia* deems this letter a forgery. No person named Lentulus was ever known to be a governor of Judaea, and no early Christian apologist ever mentioned this letter. As far as historians can tell, use of the name "Jesus Christ" started with the New Testament which, of course, had not been written at the time of "Pubulus Lentulus."

7. *Death Sentence of Jesus.* In 1810, an excavation crew in the ancient French city of Amitorm (later Aquila) uncovered a brass plate with a surprising Hebrew inscription: the decree signed by Pontius Pilate ordering the execution of Jesus Christ.[10] (See footnote 10 for the text). Although some people believe that this plate duplicates Pilate's order, most deem it an innocent work of pious fiction. No early Christian writers mention such a decree, and Jesus was not known as "Jesus Christ" at the time that he died.

8. *The Arundel Manuscript* (number 404). This is a 14th century work in possession of the British Museum. It contains a brief infancy story as told by a midwife who attended the birth of Christ. According to *Arundel,* Jesus' body was formed out of light, not flesh.

This testimony was never mentioned by early Church writers and is believed to be a late invention.

9. *The Crucifixion of Jesus, by an Eyewitness* (a.k.a. *A Letter of a Contemporary of Jesus*). This letter was supposedly written seven years after the crucifixion by an Elder of the Essene sect to a comrade in Alexandria. The letter says that Jesus was an Essene who survived the crucifixion and was cared for by his Essene brethren. There are many problems with this document. It does not seem to be traceable to a time before the 19th century. The letter mentions the four orthodox gospels by name, but all historical evidence indicates that none of the four gospels had been written so soon after the crucifixion, let alone given names. In 1936, Martin Dibelius offered a persuasive analysis that this document was based on a reconstruction of Jesus' life published in 1800-1802 entitled *Natural History of the Great Prophet of Nazareth* by K.H. Venturini.

10. *The Letter of Benan.* This 230-page letter purports to have been authored *c.*A.D. 83 by an Egyptian priest who was personally acquainted with Jesus and remained in contact with some of the Apostles after the crucifixion. Benan says that Jesus was trained in his youth by Egyptian priests. (See chapter 9 for a discussion of this theory.) The *Letter of Benan* was first released in 1910 after its alleged discovery in an Egyptian tomb. Unfortunately for the credibility of this document, the translator/editor Ernst Edler von der Planitz never produced his original for examination. A letter of that length would not have been found on the type of scroll claimed by von der Planitz. The information in the *Letter of Benan* appears to be based on a variety of sources that were available to von der Planitz at the time.

11. *Essene Admission Records of Jesus.* According to Lewis in his book *The Mystical Life of Jesus*, Rosicrucians possess admission records of a young Jesus being admitted to an Essene school at Mount Carmel. The documents have never been made available for public study, so they cannot be authenticated.

12. *The Archko Documents.* A number of letters allegedly written by eyewitnesses to Christ are presented in a book entitled *The Archko Volume* (a.k.a. *The Archko Library*), first published in 1887 by William D. Mahan of Missouri. Mahan was a Presbyterian minister who said that he came into possession of these documents when

he traveled to the libraries of the Vatican and St. Sophia Mosque in Constantinople. He said that he was assisted by two members of the Masonic Antiquarian Lodge in Genoa who acted as translators. Although *The Archko Volume* contains affidavits attesting to Mahan's good character and the truth of his trip to Europe, his work is widely regarded as a collection of forgeries. Mahan was suspended from his ministry for one year on findings that the book was based on falsification and plagiarism*. The *Archko* documents are:

A. *Eli's Story of the Magi.* This was plagiarized from the novel *Ben-Hur*, occasionally word for word. *Eli's Story* was removed from later editions of *The Archko Volume.*

B. *Report of Pilate to Tiberius* (*Archko* version). From its title, this would appear to be another version of *Pilate's Report* mentioned earlier. The *Archko* version is very different and substantially longer—it is clearly a different writing. In it we read about the trial and crucifixion of Christ, and the unusual phenomena that surrounded his resurrection.

C. *Valleus's Notes.* In A.D. 31, a Roman historian named Valleus Paterculus supposedly completed a work called *Historia Romania.* Paterculus personally met Jesus in Judaea where Christ performed miracles, cured diseases, raised the dead, caused orchards and fruit trees to wither by cursing them, and helped the poor. *The Archko Volume* does not quote directly from *Historia Romania* but only offers a page-long paraphrase with a claim that the original work can be found at the Vatican, but this has not been verified.

D. *Jonathan's Interview with the Bethlehem Shepherds.* This letter to the Jewish court was allegedly written by a priest who had been assigned to interview two shepherds that were present at the

* Despite its dubious origin, *The Archko Volume* appears to be drawn mostly from earlier writings. Like so many apocryphal (and even some Biblical) works, the documents in *Archko* are most likely forgeries, but the contents do not appear to have been invented whole cloth by the author. There are intriguing items throughout *Archko* to suggest that information came from older sources that Mahan had encountered somewhere, even if not from where he said. For these reasons, *Archko* passages will occasionally be quoted in footnotes in future chapters, but they will not be given the same weight as other apocryphal texts.

birth of Christ. *Jonathan's Interview* details the supernatural phenomena surrounding the birth. Jonathan is careful not to endorse the truth of the shepherds' stories, and he notes that many other unwed mothers claimed their babies were "born under pretended miracles" to hide the women's shame. Jonathan's letter is accompanied by another missive allegedly written by a Rabbi Melker who witnessed some of the miraculous birth phenomena, although the Melker letter only discusses religious issues.

E. *Gamaliel's Interview with Joseph and Mary and Others Concerning Jesus.* Gamaliel is mentioned in the New Testament as an influential man who had trained Paul as a Jew before Paul converted to Christianity. Mahan states that he found this report in the Talmuds of the Jews at St. Sophia Mosque. According *Gamaliel's Interview,* he was commissioned by the Sanhedrin to interview twenty-six-year-old Jesus who had not yet embarked on his religious mission. Gamaliel never caught up with Christ, but he did speak to Joseph and Mary, an elderly teacher named Massalian, and two friends of Christ named Mary and Martha. In many ways, *Gamaliel's Interview* is the most human and amusing of all the Christian apocrypha. Gamaliel's description of Joseph is insulting, he pries into Jesus' romantic inclinations to the point of embarrassment, and he reveals the despair of Christ's parents who do not feel that their son is amounting to much; in fact, they suggest that the Jewish elders should intervene to help their lazy son fulfill his ordained role as Messiah. Despite Jesus' many shortcomings and the barely-disguised selfishness of his parents, Gamaliel concludes that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah. (In *Acts* 5:34-40, Gamaliel later persuades the Jewish Sanhedrin to "go easy" on some of the apostles after the crucifixion.)

F. *Report of Caiaphas to the Sanhedrin Concerning the Execution of Jesus.* Caiaphas was the Jewish priest who presided over Christ's first trial. In this letter addressed to his superiors, Caiaphas explains why he found Jesus guilty of false teachings and deserving of the death penalty under Jewish law.

G. *Report of Caiaphas to the Sanhedrin Concerning the Resurrection of Jesus.* Mahan claims that the text of this document was written on the same scroll as the Caiaphas report described above. In this new letter, Caiaphas says that he investigated reports of

miracles connected to the resurrection, including talks with Apostles Peter and John, as well as Mary and Joanna who were involved with embalming Christ's body. Caiaphas claims that the resurrected Christ appeared to him in the presence of other witnesses.

H. *Herod Antipater's Defence Before the Roman Senate in Regard to His Conduct at Bethlehem.* This is not a letter, but an alleged record of the Roman Senate. Herod justified ordering the murder of all boys in Bethlehem aged two and under. He debunked the miracle stories told by the shepherds and criticized the religion of the Jews. One clue that this is a forgery concocted by someone associated with *The Archko Volume* is that Herod mentions the testimony of the "shepherd boys" and "Melker" as though he was familiar with the *Archko* document *Jonathan's Interview with the Bethlehem Shepherds* and the appended letter of Rabbi Melker.

I. *Herod Antipas's Defence Before the Roman Senate in Regard to the Execution of John the Baptist.* In this alleged letter from Herod to emperor Tiberius and the Roman Senate, Herod explains his defeat in a battle, the true reason for ordering the execution of John the Baptist (which is different than the reason given in the New Testament), and he briefly discusses Jesus. He also defends his father's slaughter of young Bethlehem boys decades earlier.

We have just finished a long and frustrating search to find incontrovertible eyewitness testimony to prove Christ's existence. It simply does not exist.

Surely traditional historians who lived during Jesus' day mentioned Christ in their histories, right?

Wrong.

Or maybe it is more accurate to say that if they mentioned him, their histories did not survive. In *The Christ,* Remsberg lists thirty-nine writers and historians during Jesus' time who had knowledge of events in Palestine but who failed to say a single word about the miracle worker. One of them was Philo, of whom Remsburg writes:

> Philo was born before the beginning of the Christian era, and lived until long after the reputed death of Christ. He wrote an account of the Jews covering the entire time that Christ is said to have existed on earth. He was living in or near Jerusalem when Christ's

> miraculous birth and the Herodian massacre [of all boys under age two] occurred. He was there when Christ made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He was there when the crucifixion with its attendant earthquake, supernatural darkness, and resurrection of the dead took place—when Christ himself rose from the dead, and in the presence of many witnesses ascended into heaven. These marvelous events which must have filled the world with amazement, had they really occurred, were unknown to him."[11]

In rebuttal, Christian apologists point to a handful of early non-Christian writers who seem to verify the reality of Jesus:

It is possible (but not certain) that Jesus was mentioned by a non-Christian historian named Thallus as early as *c.*A.D. 52, *i.e.*, before the New Testament Gospels were likely written. Thallus wrote about certain events that had transpired in the Eastern Mediterranean, including a fearful earthquake and darkness (solar eclipse) in Judaea. His book is now lost to history, but his passage about Judaea was discussed *c.*A.D. 221 by Christian father Julius Africanus who connects it to the Gospel stories. Africanus does not state that Thallus actually mentioned Jesus, however.

An undisputed mention of Jesus Christ is found in a famous work by Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37-*c.*A.D. 100) entitled *The Antiquities of the Jews. Antiquities* was published in A.D. 93 or 94. By that time, Christianity was already well-known. Josephus was born seven years after Jesus was reportedly put to death, and so we know that he relied on second-hand sources. He discusses Jesus in a manner that reflects traditional Christian teachings, and this makes it clear that he relied on Christian sources for his information:

> Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross [April 3, A.D. 33], those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day [April 5], as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.[12]

Did Josephus really write this? Or did a Christian scribe insert a forgery into a later translation of the book? Josephus was a Jew, and it is unlikely that he would have expressed such a reverent opinion of Christ. Josephus' original manuscript no longer exists, and all known versions are later translations. In support of the forgery theory, Remsberg points out that no Christian apologist referred to the Josephus passage until the 4th century even though they would have done so if it had existed:

> The early Christian fathers were not acquainted with it. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen all would have quoted this passage had it existed in their time. The failure of even one of these fathers to notice it would be sufficient to throw doubt upon its genuineness; the failure of all of them to notice it proves conclusively that it is spurious, that it was not in existence during the second and third centuries.[13*]

After Josephus, the next non-Christian mention of Christ surfaces in the writings of Cornelius Tacitus (*c.*A.D. 55-120). In his *Annals,* Tacitus talks about a massive fire that terrorized Rome in the year A.D. 64 during the reign of emperor Nero:

> Nero, in order to stifle the rumor [that he had caused the fire], ascribed it to those people who were abhorred for their crimes and commonly called Christians: these he punished exquisitely. The founder of that name was Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was punished as a criminal by the procurator, Pontius Pilate.[14]

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* Abelard Reuchlin, whose advertisement opens this chapter, strives to prove that Josephus had created the Christ myth and wrote the entire New Testament for the purpose of pacifying zealous Judaeans and strengthening his family's control over the region. Reuchlin theorizes that all New Testament characters are fictional, including Paul. Even amongst Jesus skeptics, this theory has not found much of a home.

The Tacitus passage fails to prove the existence of Christ for these reasons:

1. Tacitus was not born until twenty-five years after Jesus' alleged crucifixion. Even if the Tacitus passage is genuine, it merely repeats the Christian belief that someone named Christ ("Christus") had started the religion. Christ's punishment by Pilate is a story found in the gospels, and it was already being told by Christians when Tacitus wrote *Annals*.

2. The Tacitus passage may be another forgery. It was not quoted until the fifteenth century, and only one copy of *Annals* existed at that time. It was owned by a Christian. Earlier Christian fathers never mentioned the Tacitus passage, including Clement of Alexandria (*c.*A.D. 150-*c.*215) who made a compilation of all non-Christian recognitions of Christ. A similar compilation was made a century later by Eusebius of Caesarea (*c.*A.D. 260-*c.*340) who also failed to mention the Tacitus passage.

A prolific Roman writer named Suetonius (c.A.D. 69-130's) wrote a history *c.*A.D. 120 entitled *Lives of the Caesars*. This work is widely regarded as genuine, including the passage about Christ. In Book 5 of *Lives*, Suetonius tells what Roman emperor Claudius did to the Jews:

> He expelled the Jews from Rome [ca. A.D. 49], because of the rioting in which they were constantly engaging at the instigation of Chrestus.[15]*

The Suetonius passage is actually a problem to Christians and skeptics alike. It implies that Jesus was alive almost fifteen years after his crucifixion, and he went to Rome where he did some serious rabble-rousing. This contradicts the important Christian belief that Jesus ascended into heaven within two months of the Resurrection. It deprives skeptics of their argument that no one commented about Christ during his lifetime since Suetonius' report would have originated with a contemporary eyewitness or

* "Chrestus" is almost certainly another spelling of Christ; in fact, the use of that spelling was criticized *c.*A.D. 311 by Christian historian Lactanticus when he complained of "the error of the ignorant, who by the change of a letter are accustomed to call him Chrestus."[16]

official. This increases the chances that there really lived a dissident Jew called "Christ" when Jesus supposedly lived, *i.e.*, he would have been in his 50's at the time of the riots in Rome, which means that the Suetonius account aligns perfectly with gospel stories.

On the other hand, the Suetonius passage is not conclusive proof of Christ's existence:

1. Suetonius may have been referring to the followers or teachings of Christ, not to Christ himself.

2. "Christ" is not a real name but is merely a label which means "Messiah." The rebel mentioned by Suetonius may have been someone other than Jesus claiming to be a Messiah.

3. The troublemaker of Rome could have been a man with the common name of Jesus whom Suetonius mistakenly thought was "the Christ."

Around the year A.D. 500, a set of sixty-three books was completed containing Jewish oral tradition and law. This compilation is known as the Talmud. The first part was finished *c.*A.D. 200, and it contains a passage about "Yeshu" (Jesus Christ) who was "hanged" (a word sometimes used to mean "crucified"). According to the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 43a), a herald went around forty days before the execution announcing that Yeshu would be stoned to death because he practiced sorcery and enticed Jews to apostasy; persons with anything to say in his defense should come forward. No one did, so Yeshu was hanged on the eve of Passover. This passage has some credibility because it includes Jewish legal elements that the New Testament is missing: the call for witnesses forty days before the event, and the penalty of stoning instead of crucifixion. The Talmudic passage, however, was compiled no earlier than A.D. 70, by which time Christian stories were in circulation. The Talmudic story might be a variation of a Christ myth that was being spread by those who evangelized to the Jews.

Is there any physical evidence that proves Christ's existence?

Imagine if we could see an actual bone from the body of an Apostle, hold the cup that Jesus sipped from at the Last Supper, or feel the wood of the crucifix.

Supposedly we can. Such relics and many more are in the possession of Catholic churches and have been revered for centuries. The alleged bones of Apostle Andrew are enshrined at Amalfi,

Italy. The remains of James (the Greater) are said to be buried in a Spanish crypt. Skeletal remains of Peter are entombed at the Vatican, and a chair that he supposedly used is on display there. Apostle John left at least one tooth, and Bartholomew an arm.

Other Christ-connected people have also left relics. A green ribbon belt worn by mother Mary is at the Cathedral of Prato, Italy. The remains of Jesus' friend Lazarus are said to be in France, and plenty of relics related to Mary Magdalene are to be found.

In 2002, there was great excitement over the discovery of an ossuary (a receptacle for storing the bones of a dead person). It bore the carved inscription, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." The discovery made global headlines, and some scholars of high repute considered the item to be the first archaeological discovery to fully corroborate biblical references to Jesus. Unfortunately, Israeli authorities had evidence that the inscription was forged by an antiquities collector of dubious background, and he was arrested. Defenders continue to support its authenticity, and the debate goes on. (See the magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review.)*

As for Jesus himself, no Catholic church claims to have any of his body parts. He reportedly left behind other relics, the most famous being his alleged burial cloth which is known today as the Shroud of Turin. Another smaller cloth that reportedly covered his face in the tomb (the "Cloth of Oviedo") can be seen at a church in Spain. Christ's cup at the Last Supper (*i.e.*, the Holy Grail) was put on display at the 1933-1934 World's Fair in Chicago, and it eventually found a home at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. A Holy Grail was also housed at the Cathedral of Valencia. Other relics include pieces of Jesus' cross, the nails and spear that were driven into his flesh, the crown of thorns and tunic he wore while carrying the crucifix, and even some of his baby clothes*.

* No relic could be more exciting than an actual photograph of Jesus' face. Such a picture was snapped in the mid-1950's by Italian priest Pellegrino Ernitti who co-invented a photographic time machine that he called the Chronovisor. Books were written about Father Ernetti's reality-shattering invention and its ability to see back in time. Alas, his credibility took a nose-dive when it was discovered that the photo was merely of a carved Jesus on display in the Sanctuary of Merciful Love at Collevalenza.

The problem with relics is that they lost most of their credibility centuries ago when they became big business. Churches and wealthy people with plenty of cash and favors to bestow created a high demand for relics. Eager providers filled the void by "discovering" relics on the basis of flimsy evidence. Outright fakes were showing up as early as the fourth century A.D. when the problem was mentioned by St. Augustine. St. Gregory of Tours complained about hoaxed relics in the sixth century, and the Councils of Lyons (1243 and 1275) prohibited the veneration of newly-discovered relics until they were approved by the Papacy. The councils at Trent (1543-1563) addressed the problem, and even today the Catholic Church continues to be cautious. Despite these efforts to ensure authenticity, an impossible number of relics have been venerated over the centuries. There are at least thirty nails from Jesus' crucifix (and you thought there were only three), seventy thorns (an impossible number) from his crown, and more than two arms from Mary Magdalene's body. (The Bible does not mention Magdalene having physical deformities.)

This ends a fruitless search for conclusive proof that Jesus Christ even existed. We can easily prove the reality of other individuals from that era who enjoyed much less fame, so why is the most famous person who ever lived so elusive?

Perhaps the most incriminating evidence against the reality of Christ is what the gospels do *not* say about him. Many people have puzzled over the "missing years" in his life between the age of about five and twelve, and then again from twelve until about thirty. The New Testament gospels are silent about those Missing Years. What was Jesus doing?

The skeptics' answer: nothing!

The gospel writers did not bother inventing tales to fill the gaps since they are not important for a Christ myth. They only needed to make up a miraculous virgin birth with all of its surrounding details, an episode of twelve-year-old Jesus at a temple to "prove" that he was a Jew, and finally his adult ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Was the Jesus Myth based on anything? Where would the creators get the ideas of a virgin birth, crucifixion, and resurrection? As it turns out, these were all common themes in earlier non-

Christian ("pagan"*) religions. We discover Virgin-and-Child duos in Isis and Horus (Egypt, *c.*3427 B.C.), Rhea Silvia and Quirinus (a.k.a. Romulus) (Rome, *c.*506 B.C.), Leto and Apollo (ancient Greece), and Devaki and Krishna (India, *c.*1200 - 900 B.C.).

The Virgin and Child theme may be based on astrology or solar deities. In *Origin of Worship,* Charles Francois Dupius points out the connection:

> The god is born about December 25th, without sexual intercourse, for the sun, entering the winter solstice, emerges in the sign of Virgo, the heavenly Virgin...His infancy is begirt with dangers, because the newborn Sun is feeble in the midst of the winter's fogs and mists, which threaten to devour him; his life is one of toil and peril culminating at the spring equinox in a final struggle with the powers of darkness. At that period the day and night are equal, and both fight for the mastery. [After descending out of sight] he rises again triumphant, and he rises in the sign of the Lamb, and is thus the Lamb of God, carrying away the darkness and death of the winter months. Henceforth he triumphs, growing ever stronger and more brilliant. He ascends into the zenith, and there he glows, on the right hand of God, himself God, the very substance of the Father, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, upholding all things by his life-giving power.[17]

Was the Christ story merely an adaptation of astrology and sun worship? The number twelve for Jesus' Twelve Apostles corresponds to the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The day set aside to worship Christ (Sunday) is the *dies solis* of sun worshippers. Jewish Sabbath is Saturday, and if Jesus truly fulfilled the promises of Judaism, then the Christian Sabbath should also be on Saturday, but it is not.

Debunkers of the Christ story point to similarities between Jesus and other pagan deities:

* "Pagan" refers to any religion that is not Christian, Jewish or Islamic. It comes from the Latin word *pagus* which means "village." Early Christianity was mostly urban, and so most non-Christians lived in the rural areas. They were therefore called villagers, *i.e.,* pagans.

Krishna. A Sanskrit dictionary compiled more than 2,200 years ago describes the life of the Asian deity Krishna—a god who was worshipped about 900 to 1200 years before Christ. Krishna was portrayed as an incarnate god born of a virgin. As an infant, he miraculously escaped from a tyrant who ruled his country. Both Krishna and Christ performed miracles, healed the sick, and raised the dead. Both of them were spiritual saviors who died on behalf of humanity.

Buddha. Siddhartha Gautama, better known as the "Buddha" (the "Enlightened One"), was a religious teacher in India around the year 530 B.C. About three hundred years later, his teachings were incorporated into a text known as the *Lalita Vistara.* This work, along with the Buddhist scripture *Tripitaka* (reportedly written in the centuries immediately following the Buddha's life), offer details that cause Christ to sound remarkably like the Buddha:

1. The Buddha was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He fasted for forty-nine nights and days. (Jesus fasted forty days). The Buddha traveled with a "band of disciples" preaching to large audiences. Salvation was promised to all who followed the teachings*.

2. Buddhism and Christianity have organizations of celibate monks, use the image of their savior as the central temple or church object, and have holy relics.

3. More similarities between Christianity and Buddhism are noted in chapter 12.

Osiris. Osiris was a solar god and one of humanity's first deities. He was worshipped in Egypt as early as 3427 B.C. and throughout much of the known world around 2000 B.C., including in Greece and Rome. Osiris was slain by Typhon (a Satan-type figure), but he rose again and became ruler of the dead where he passes judgment on the departed: the righteous are given eternal life and the wicked are destroyed. Osiris was also part of a holy Trinity (Osiris, Isis, and Horus) which is similar to the Catholic Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost).

Horus. Horus was an Egyptian solar deity conceived in the

* There is also a virgin birth story connected to Buddha, but it is uncertain when this belief started.

womb of his virgin mother Isis. The early Roman Catholic Church portrayed Virgin Mary in a veil similar to the one that adorned Isis in Egypt.

Quirinus. Quirinus (also known as Romulus) was the Roman deity worshipped as the founder of Rome. He was one of two twins born of a virgin who had been impregnated by the god Mars. At the end of his life, Quirinus was carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire but later reappeared in a glorified form to announce the future greatness of the Roman people.

The list goes on. Christ has similarities to Confucius, Lao Tzu, Zoroaster, Mithra, Sosiosh, Adonis, Zeus, Apollo, Persus, Hercules, Dionysos, Prometheus, Asclepias, Plato, Pythagoras, Bacchus, Saturn, Odin, Thor, Baldur, and the Roman Caesars who were worshipped as gods. In the next chapter, we will discuss his similarity to the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana.

Jesus was not the first savior to supposedly die by crucifixion. In *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors (or Christianity Before Christ),* Kersey Graves pinpoints more, although it is not possible in each case to know if the crucifixion stories were created before or after Christianity, and to what extent they are mere myths:

1. *Krishna.* The British Museum owns a collection of drawings taken from ancient Hindu sculptures and monuments that depict Krishna suspended on a cross with holes pierced in his feet. In one illustration, a halo of glory is visible over the crucifix image.

2. *Sakia Muni* was a sin-atoning savior of Asia who reportedly lived *c.*600 B.C. One legend recounts that he was put to death by an arrow that penetrated his body and fastened him to a tree. The right angle created by the tree trunk and arrow formed a cross. Sakia Muni's crime was picking a flower in a garden.

3. *Iao* (a.k.a. Jao) was a spiritual savior in Nepal *c.*622 B.C. who was reportedly crucified on a tree.

4. *Prometheus* was a mythical Greek god worshipped *c.*550 B.C. He came to Earth to intervene and suffer on humanity's behalf, but he was crucified on a wooden beam for his trouble. Prometheus willingly suffered his fate out of love for humanity. At the time of his crucifixion, the earth shook, graves were opened, and the sky became dark. The story of Prometheus was popular in Greek theater well before the birth of Christianity.

5. *Mithra* was a popular god in 7th-century B.C. Persia. One version of the legend has him born on December 25 to a virgin mother and dying by crucifixion to a tree. Mithra redeemed the souls of men and elevated them to a better world. Mithraic ceremonies included baptism to remove sins, anointing, and a sacred meal of bread and water. One ritual seems to have taught the idea of souls bursting out of the "cave" of the universe to enter the transcendent space beyond, similar to Plato's idea of a soul journeying to the edge of the cosmos and seeing what is outside. (See *Phaedrus.*) Mithraism was widely practiced in the Roman empire before Christianity, and it was prominent in Paul's home city of Tarsus. Paul may have used Mithraism as the basis for a Christ myth.

Over the centuries, Christians adopted many pagan practices such as the display of Christmas trees, exchanging gifts in late December, and using candles for worship. None of these "Christian" activities are based on New Testament writings, and they are further evidence that Christianity was built from pagan sources. (Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas for this reason.)

If we were to ask a skeptic, "How would you summarize the history of Christianity?", we might get the following response:

Sometime during the first century A.D., a handful of men in Roman-occupied Judaea decided to form a new sect. They were familiar with Judaism, astrology, and tales of deities who were born of virgins, crucified, and resurrected. These elements were mixed into a stew called the story of "Jesus, the Christ." After preaching the story for several decades, members of the group decided to write it down at different times and places. From this process arose the most influential myth ever created.

What motivated the mythmakers? The dark view was well-expressed by Joseph Wheless in *Forgery in Christianity:*

> Lyingly founded on forgery upon forgery, as has been made manifest by manifold admissions and proofs, the Church of Christ perpetuated itself and consolidated its vast usurped powers, and amassed amazing wealth, by a series of further and more secular forgeries and frauds unprecedented in human history—faintly approximated only by its initial forgeries of the fundamental gospels and epistles of the "New Testament..."

> The record [of additional Christian forgeries]...is the most sordid in human annals—of frauds and forgeries perpetrated for the base purposes of greed for worldly riches and power, and designed so to paralyze and stultify the minds and reason of men that they should suffer themselves to be exploited without caring or daring to question or complain, and be helpless to resist the crimes committed against them.[18]

A milder view is expressed by people like Professor Arnold Rothstein. Jesus was simply a grand wish:

> Jesus is an idea of salvation substantialized and historicized over a considerable time span...Concerning the actual earthly existence of such an individual, we can know next to nothing, all efforts to recover a human history ending in failure. He exists purely as a portrait of supreme innocence and purity...[19]

To skeptics, the case is closed. Jesus Christ has lived only in the minds of fervent believers, but never as a real man.

Reservations

Orion glanced at his watch and saw that it was nearly noon. Was he wasting his time with Joe? Another hour would not hurt, Orion decided, since he had no other lunch appointment.

"Joe," he said, "I'm hungry. Let's go get a bite to eat."

(Buzz!)

"Sandy, would you please call the Grille and make a reservation for two in thirty minutes?...Keep taking messages...If Bernie calls, remind him that I'll be seeing him tonight at Spago for the wrap party.

Orion returned to his seat opposite Joe.

"Now, friend," he resumed, "How can I do anything for you if Jesus Christ never existed? That would mean you're either crazy or a liar. I admit, that hasn't stopped a few people from becoming famous, but I won't be a party to a scam like that."

"You speak as you should," Joe agreed. "You must never proclaim something important to the world about which you have hidden doubts, otherwise you may be a party to great injury. Even if you occasionally fail to recognize the truth, your integrity is of much greater importance."

Joe rose to his feet, smiled warmly, and extended his hand. "I am a long way from home with little money. May I keep the airline ticket you so graciously purchased so that I may return to New York?"

Orion was choked by a sudden panic that amazed him. He felt that he should permit Joe to walk out of his life, but a baffling compulsion gripped him.

"Wait!" Orion heard himself blurt out. "I didn't mean that the way it sounded. I was only talking hypothetically. For the sake of argument, let's say that a man named Jesus Christ never existed. But maybe there was someone else—a real person with a real name—who was later turned into 'Jesus Christ.' Now, that's possible, right?"

"Of course."

"Well, good. Let's go to lunch and talk about it on the way."

Chapter 4

Jesus: Apollonius of Tyana

Apollonius of Tyana...was replaced by a Fictitious Messiah called "Jesus Christ"—The Greatest Fraud in History.[1]

The Unknown Life of Christ by Dr. Raymond Bernard

What if a fictional "Jesus Christ" was based on a person who had actually lived during that era? What if that person was a man known as Apollonius of Tyana?

A few skeptics believe that Apollonius was a fictional character because of the obvious myths that eventually surrounded him, but most historians acknowledge him as a real individual. He is mentioned by several reliable independent sources, including early Christian leaders who tried to diminish his fame.

Apollonius was born into a wealthy Greek family in the city of Tyana about the time that Jesus was supposedly born. As an adult, Apollonius became a widely-traveled philosopher and spiritual teacher. He journeyed to Palestine, Babylon, Rome, Spain, and as far east as India and Nepal where he studied Hinduism and Buddhism. Apollonius was probably one of the most footloose prophets of his day, and he gained admission into a variety of religious sects and spiritual brotherhoods where he both learned and taught.

Apollonius was best known for his teachings about the immortality of the soul, metempsychosis (*i.e.*, reincarnation: the transmigration of the soul from one body to another), and a supreme deity. He traveled and preached extensively throughout the Roman Empire where over a dozen temples were erected in his honor.

Not everyone liked him. The despotic emperor Nero and his successor Domitian caused Apollonius to be imprisoned, but the prophet reportedly escaped by miraculous means. He lived to old age, perhaps reaching 100, and died either in Ephesus where he established his last school, or in India.

Of his personal qualities, we are told that Apollonius was extremely beautiful as a youth, gentle, and had a powerful memory and studious disposition. He enjoyed good-natured (and sometimes ironic) humor. Apollonius was a vegan—a person who abstains from eating or using anything of animal origin. He lived a simple life style by letting his hair grow, wearing plain white linen cloth, and walking barefoot. When he received an inheritance from his father, Apollonius kept only a small portion for himself and distributed the remainder to poor relatives. He never married or had children. His primary companion was a devoted male friend named Damis. Damis deeply loved Apollonius and kept a written record of the prophet's activities.

Most of what we know about Apollonius comes from a biography written in A.D. 216 by Flavius Philostratus, an Athenian author of high repute. His work, *Vie d'Apo (Life of Apollonius)*, drew on many sources, including the writings of Damis and letters penned by Apollonius. When we peruse *Vie d'Apo*, we discover remarkable parallels between the stories of the Greek teacher and Jesus:

1. Angels sang at Jesus' birth. Messengers of the god Apollo did the same when Apollonius was born.
2. Apollonius was a miracle healer, and priests often sent ill people to him for cures. Jesus also healed by miracles and received referrals.
3. Jesus and Apollonius could both foretell the future.
4. Both of them cured insanity by driving out demons.
5. Apollonius may have brought a dead person back to life. In one episode, the body of a wealthy young lady was being carried in a funeral procession. Apollonius took her hand, bent over, and said a few words in a low tone. She opened her eyes, spoke, and was carried back to her father's house*. Compare this to *Matthew* 9:18-25 where Jesus restores the life of a recently-deceased daughter of a local official by taking her hand.
6. Apollonius traveled to Rome where he was arrested on charges of allowing himself to be worshiped, speaking against the reigning powers, and pretending that his words were inspired by

* Philostratus does not claim that this was a miracle since it was not certain "whether Apollonius noticed that the spark of the soul was still alive which her friends had failed to perceive—they say it was raining lightly and a slight vapour showed on her face—or whether he made the life in her warm again and so restored her..."[2]

gods. Jesus was arrested and tried for claiming to be the Jewish Messiah, allegedly speaking out against authority, and saying that he was the Son of God.

7. Apollonius could miraculously disappear and reappear. Philostratus hints that Apollonius may have left his own tomb after death on his own power. Jesus disappeared from his tomb after death and miraculously reappeared alive elsewhere.

8. Jesus and Apollonius both rejected wealth. They lived and dressed simply.

9. Apollonius had a loyal circle of up to ten people with whom he traveled and lived communally. This is similar to Christ's entourage of twelve apostles.

The implication seems clear:

> "...no such man as Jesus of Nazareth ever lived, but the name was adopted by the framers of Christianity to cover the identity of Apollonius of Tyana whose teachings and mode of life they purloined and made use of as a model upon which to construct their system."[3]

Proponents of the Jesus Was Apollonius Theory point out a curious fact. Damis never mentioned Christ in his writings despite Apollonius' widespread travels within the Roman Empire. Two hundred years later, Philostratus was also silent about the existence of Christ even though he pointed out the errors of other religions. It seems that Damis and Philostratus had never heard of Jesus or were unconcerned about him, and this may be further evidence that Christ never existed. Apostle Paul probably knew about Apollonius and may have used him as the model for a Christ myth. Apollonius was in Paul's home city of Tarsus when they were children, and the last city in which Apollonius established a religious school was Ephesus—a key center of earliest Christianity.

The Jesus Was Apollonius Theory has its critics. *Vie d'Apo* was written more than two centuries after Christ. This makes it possible that an Apollonius myth was based on Jesus, and not vice versa. The New Testament states that Christ had many women followers, but that was not true of Apollonius. Such a detail would not have been added to a Christ myth if it was not necessary. After

all, traditional Judaism did not permit women to play a significant role in religious affairs, and the earliest Christians were trying to convert Jews.

The theory in this chapter turns the spotlight to a fascinating spiritual teacher who came along during the tumultuous years of the first century A.D. Even if the Apollonius theory does not provide us with conclusive answers about Christ's identity, it offers another glimpse into the many spiritual byways that humanity has traveled. It also reminds us that itinerant preachers have been a part of humanity's spiritual mosaic for millennia. Some of them today fly first class on luxury airliners, stay at deluxe hotels, and attract thousands of devotees to events that are staged in enormous meeting places with sophisticated video and audio technology. The barefoot preachers of yore have come a long way.

Yearning

Orion and Joe were silent as the purring Rolls carried them toward the restaurant. The agent turned to his prospective client.

"Joe, listen. All of this stuff is so obscure. Either you're Jesus Christ or you're not. That's how we like things today: black and white, you're in or you're out. Don't get me wrong. You're a fine-looking fellow and very personable. In fact, if this Second Coming thing doesn't work out, I'll get you a modeling contract and hook you up with a great acting coach so you can be on a soap. I just can't have you going all surreal on me."

"Am I starting to seem like an illusion to you?"

Orion laughed.

"This is turning into the kind of conversation I used to have in college. 'Is the world really an illusion?' 'What is reality?' 'What does it all mean?'"

"Ah, the eternal questions," Joe nodded. "Do you miss searching for the answers?"

The agent let out a sigh.

"You know, when I look back on those days and remember the late night raps about life and 'the meaning of it all,' I really miss them. They were some of the richest moments of my life, just sitting in dorm rooms and talking with friends for hours about philosophy and politics. They helped me grow up and change into a better person."

Joe gave Orion a comforting squeeze on the arm. "Deep in your heart, you are still a seeker. Never give up the search."

"Is it really worth the time? My course in life is set now."

"Wisdom affects people in ways that they cannot appreciate until they have experienced it. It determines how we react to life, and even what happens afterwards."

"I have zero spare time right now. Do you have a pill I can pop for instant enlightenment?"

"I hope not," Joe grinned. "It is enough that I am becoming surreal to you. I do not want you to see me next as a full-blown drug hallucination."

Chapter 5

Jesus: The Mushroom

CAUTION

This chapter contains sexually explicit descriptions. Persons offended by such matters should proceed directly to the next chapter.

Was Jesus a mushroom?

The Psychedelic 60's were winding down by 1970, the year in which a startling book was published entitled *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*. No less a publisher than Doubleday brought out the American edition, and Bantam followed with the paperback. The tome would have been largely ignored had it not been written by a famous Dead Sea Scrolls scholar, the late John Allegro. His conclusion was simple. "Jesus Christ" was not a human being, but a psychedelic mushroom used in fertility cults.

Yes. Allegro was serious.

In ancient times, fertility religions were popular and human sexual functions could be graphic metaphors for life. Rain is the ejaculation of a god's life-giving semen poured down by a mighty phallus. When it hits the furrows of Mother Earth (the vulva), life springs forth. This sexual union of Heaven and Earth triggers the birth of another phallus that can lead people to spiritual enlightenment: the psychedelic mushroom.

Many fertility sects of the ancient Middle East were headquartered in temples where orgiastic rites were performed to increase wealth and fertility of land. Temple prostitution was common to ensure that practitioners performed these rites correctly, and this became a good source of revenue for the priests. Allegro speculated that Judaism and Christianity began as fertility sects that used the hallucinogenic mushroom *amanita muscaria*—a common fungus in the Middle East characterized by red skin and white dots. *Amanita muscaria* resembles an erect phallus with a red top that leaves an oily film (a kind of "semen"). Allegro theorized that Biblical events and personalities are nothing more than false cover stories that make superficial sense to outsiders, but to insiders they convey the teachings of the mushroom/fertility cults. For example:

Moses never existed. He was a mushroom, and the two tablets with the Ten Commandments were each one half of the membranous covering (volva) that mushrooms produce in early stages of growth. Jacob was not a man either. He was a mushroom stem, and his brother Esau (the "red-skinned one") was a volva. Ezekiel's vision of "wheels within wheels" was a mushroom-induced hallucination. This means that much of the Old Testament is really about humanity's experimentation with psychedelic fungi and sexual rites, but the cover stories eventually became the religion, and the real meaning of the Old Testament was lost.

To support his theory, Allegro points to Bible-based art. A 13th-century fresco from a ruined church in France shows Adam and Eve standing by the Tree of Life, but the tree clearly resembles the *Amanita muscaria*. The First Couple therefore did not eat an apple, but instead they obtained their forbidden enlightenment from a psychedelic mushroom.

The Old Testament reports that the ancient Jews were not allowed to participate in fertility sects and temple prostitution. Allegro theorizes that when that happened, fertility/mushroom practices went underground and reemerged not only as Old Testament Judaism, but also as Christianity. As we will see in chapter 8, Jesus is often linked to a sect known as the Essenes. Allegro suggests that the Essenes were mushroom eaters who invented a mythical Christ to preserve their teachings within a story that would seem innocent to the Romans: a powerless prophet who advocated peace and paying taxes to Rome. To prove his point, Allegro finds abundant evidence of mushrooms and fertility in the New Testament:

Sumerian sound symbols ("phonemes") associated with fertility rites are found twice in the Hebrew form of Jesus' name, *Yehoshua.*

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 states: "Jews demand signs, Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ nailed to the cross; and though this is an offense to Jews and folly to Gentiles..." The original Greek word translated as "offense" has a root meaning of "snare," and because Greek snares were like "bolts," the reference is probably to bolt (phallus)-shaped mushrooms that were called "bolt plants." Therefore, the idea of "Christ crucified" was not an "offense" to the Jews, it was a "bolt plant" to them.

According to Allegro, "Christ nailed to the cross" can be translated as "semen-anointed, erected mushroom" because the word "Christian" is actually based on root words meaning "smeared with semen." This indicates that the earliest Christians dabbed semen on one another in their rituals instead of water.

Allegro develops his mushroom hypothesis further:

The wise men who visited baby Jesus were drug peddlers.

"John the Baptist" really meant "red-topped mushroom."

And so on.

The effort by Christians to disguise their real teachings in a Jesus cover story backfired. Christians were hated and persecuted by the Romans anyway, and the cover story became the religion just as it had with Judaism.

Few linguists have embraced Allegro's book. A common criticism is that he overextended his word associations. In his analysis of *1 Corinthians* 1:22, Allegro was alright to go from "offense" to "snare," but the jump from "snare" to "bolt" was only a guess, and so was the next hop from "bolt" to "bolt plant." He made this type of leap frequently, including from "Christian" to "smeared with semen." "Yehoshua"— the Hebrew word for Jesus—was a common name in those days: Josephus mentions at least thirteen people with that name in his histories, and so it is unlikely that it was simply a code word for the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom.

The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross was not Allegro's only book. His writings about the Dead Sea Scrolls were popular, and he became a hero when he lobbied for quick public release of the Scrolls. Sadly, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* damaged his academic reputation despite his admission that it was only speculation. One of his publishers even took the unusual step of apologizing for it. Does that mean that we should dismiss it entirely?

In *The Mystery of Manna*, Dan Merkur, Ph.D. analyzes the Old Testament where he also finds evidence of mind-altering substances, but of a different sort. The mysterious heavenly "manna" that fed hungry Israelites may have been bread containing the psychoactive fungus ergot from which LSD is made. This bread may have had strong religious meaning because the ergot can induce visions of "God" and experiences of "ecstatic ascent" into heaven. After the orthodox churches banned psychoactive substances, hal-

lucinogens may have remained a mainstay in some mystery religions, Gnostic groups, and fraternal orders like early Freemasonry.

A more popular theory is that Biblical manna was mushrooms, but not *Amanita muscaria*. The book of *Exodus* says that the manna appeared suddenly as small flakes on the ground after a morning dew, which is a characteristic of mushrooms. The manna quickly rotted, attracted maggots, and seemed to melt in the hot sun, which is true of tiny mushrooms when they stay on the ground and shrivel in the heat. Some people have speculated that those were psilocybin mushrooms which are still used as hallucinogens today, and that is why the wandering Israelites had so many visions and communications with "God."

As for Biblical "bread," maybe it, too, was mushrooms, but of the *Amanita muscaria* variety. Christ's "bread" was supposed to lead to resurrection, and *Amanita muscaria* simulates that phenomenon because it can induce deep sleep followed by a sense of being resurrected when awakened. Some users say they experience "ego death" and a type of spiritual rebirth. Flies seem to die when they make contact with the mushroom, but about twelve hours later they will revive and fly away. Jesus is quoted as saying that he is the "true bread from heaven" (*John* 6:32) and the "bread of God" (*John* 6:32). In other words, "Jesus" was really a hallucinogen that leads to visions of God and experiences of "resurrection." When the cap of the *Amanita muscaria* curls upwards, the mushroom can resemble a chalice or cup, and this may be the true "Holy Grail" that beckoned spiritual seekers of the past.

In *Magic Mushrooms in Religion and Alchemy,* Clark Heinrich finds evidence of a cross-cultural mushroom cult that encompassed everything from Vedic beliefs to Judeo-Christian sects and alchemists. If true, then it was well-established by Christ's time.

Another follow-up study is a slender but fascinating volume called *Mushrooms and Mankind* by James Arthur which presents more intriguing facts:

1. Several centuries-old renderings of Jesus' halo look like the underside of a mushroom (*i.e.,* the mushroom cap). The mushroom effect is created by the lines that radiate from the head to the perimeter of the halo. The halo image in Christian art may have been intended to depict a mushroom, not a radiance or spirit.

2. The *Amanita muscaria* mushroom is red with white spots, and it typically grows at the foot of pine trees. On the anniversary of Christ's birth (December 25), many Christians place gifts at the foot of a pine tree and say that they came from Santa Claus who dresses in red and white. The symbolism seems obvious. It represents the "spiritual gifts" that are delivered by red-and-white hallucinogenic mushrooms which grow under pine trees.

3. As we will see in a later chapter, there are theories of a Christ connection to ancient Egypt where some temple pillars were shaped like mushrooms. We will also examine theories of Jesus having contacts with Far Eastern religions where some deities were portrayed with mushrooms. The extraordinary temple designs at Angkor, Cambodia can be interpreted as pine trees that stand atop spaces set aside for spiritual development. Ancient headdresses from that region display images of mushrooms beneath pine trees.

And the original holy wine? A few people have argued that it was pee. Yes, literally. Hindu scriptures have promoted urine-drinking as spiritual, and Siberian shamans have been known to drink reindeer urine. This is because the psychoactive element in *Amanita muscaria* stays potent in urine for up to seven digestions.

Marijuana may have been another drug of choice among early Jews and Christians. A formula in *Exodus* for making anointing oil includes six pounds of the potent marijuana extract *kaneh-bosem*. Early Christians used *kaneh-bosem* for ritual purposes, and it may have been used for physical healing since it can assist against epilepsy, skin diseases, and eye and menstrual problems.

All of this reminds us of a reality that is largely ignored. Mind-altering drugs have been used in the healing and spiritual arts for millennia. Our modern world is witness to a pharmaceutical industry that produces massive quantities of mind, emotion, and sometimes reality-altering drugs to address all sorts of mental, emotional, and spiritual deficiencies. This did not start in the twentieth century but has been going on for thousands of years. We might question whether this has been a good thing or not, but we cannot doubt the pervasiveness of it.

Santa Claus and Christmas trees may never look the same again.

Lunch

La La Landa Bistro and Grille was hopping. The name *La La Landa* was a play on the slang term for Los Angeles, "La La Land." Its founders were two of Orion's celebrity clients, and he had helped them secure the rights to Richie Valens' famous song *La Bamba* to use as the restaurant jingle: "La la la la Lan-da Bis-tro and Grille...."

La La Landa was a decidedly tony venue off Rodeo Drive that catered to the Beverly Hills elite. Orion recognized half of the patrons as he and Joe were escorted to their table by the maitre d'. Moments after the menus arrived, one of the owners bustled over.

"Orie!" a well-preserved fifty-something woman gushed at Orion. "Are you hiding from me, you naughty boy? My psychic told me that I would meet a long-lost friend this week. So it's you, and I couldn't be happier."

"I'm happy to see you, too, CiCi," Orion replied as he stood and kissed her hand. "Serena sends her greetings and wants to powwow with you about that orphans' charity gala."

"Oh, I meant to call her yesterday, but we had a problem here. Those city inspectors can be such bothers."

CiCi looked at Joe.

"Who is this darling young man?" she asked. "I don't think I've seen him before. One of your new discoveries?"

"I hope so. CiCi, this is Joe. Joe, CiCi is one of the owners of this restaurant."

CiCi wrinkled her nose in a mock frown. "I own the troublesome part, I'm afraid."

Joe stood and took her hand in his. "Your establishment is beautiful. I am looking forward to dining here."

"Well, you sit and enjoy," she replied. "I need to go speak with Arte, but don't you two run and hide. I'll be back."

CiCi left the two men to ponder their menus.

"Do you like fish?" Orion inquired. "The seared salmon is one of the house specialties. Or you might enjoy the prawns over wild rice."

They placed their orders, and Orion got right to business.

"Listen, friend, I can't promote you as 'This is Jesus Christ who is really Abalone of Diana...'"

"Apollonius of Tyana," Joe corrected him.

"Right, or here's the Big Red Mushroom that's arrived under the Christmas tree for it's Second Coming. I just can't make that happen for you."

Joe considered Orion's words and asked, "What image do you have of me?"

"That's a good question. In fact, that is the key question. We need to talk image here."

Orion was interrupted by CiCi's return.

"Oh," she frowned as she sat beside Joe. "You both look so serious. Orie, don't go putting wrinkles onto this beautiful man's forehead."

"CiCi," Orion turned to her. "Let me ask you a question. You read a lot of books on spirituality, right? What does Jesus Christ mean to you?"

"Oh, he was a precious man, but there were so many lies told about him by people who should have known better."

Joe obviously enjoyed CiCi's comment.

Orion prompted her further.

"So what about the Bible, then? Is it the truth?"

"There's much truth in there, yes. But, darling, you have to watch out for the booby traps."

Chapter 6

Jesus: A Man Buried Under Myth

> It may be conceded as possible, and even probable, that a religious enthusiast of Galilee, named Jesus, was the germ of this mythical Jesus Christ.[1]
>
> John E. Remsberg, *The Christ: A Critical Review and Analysis of The Evidence of His Existence.*

Remsberg's statement is surprising in light of his authorship of a renowned skeptical writing about Jesus. Is he right to suggest that a true person named Jesus lies at the core of a powerful myth?

There is logic to the basic events in the New Testament. A man named Jesus preached, was crucified in the typical Roman fashion, and people close to him continued to spread his spiritual message after he was gone. Most people were illiterate in those days, and so the founding Christians relied on oral dissemination until they decided that it would be a good idea to finally put the story to paper. By then, the writers had a common agenda which affected the "spin" they would put on the story.

There is even a plausible explanation why Jesus' name does not appear in contemporary histories.

For more than a thousand years after his lifetime, there was no book printing, mass-communication, photocopying, or Internet. Scribes hand-copied books one-by-one. Books were created by compilers who gathered written parchments and bound them together with clasps and boards. It was easy for any scribe or compiler to simply not copy a work, or to alter it and destroy the original, and some of them did. Few original manuscripts from the first few centuries A.D. exist today—we rely on copies, and copies of copies of copies. That is certainly true of all New Testament writings.

For the first few centuries A.D., Jewish and Roman opposition to Christianity was very strong. Horrible atrocities were wreaked on Christians at the behest of Roman emperors. Traditional Jews, although much less violent, had no motivation to perpetuate the Christian apostasy and every reason to squelch it. These two groups provided Palestine/Judaea with most of its scribes and compilers. They had every opportunity to dispose of records about Jesus and delete references to him in the non-Christian works they compiled. Only Christians had the drive to preserve their history and teachings, and this would logically explain why they became the source of our knowledge about Jesus.

Conversely, Christians can also be blamed for destroying early writings that might have proven the existence of their founder. By the end of the fourth century A.D., Christianity was the official religion of the East Roman Empire. No longer did Christians fight each other with mere oratory and excommunication. A rigid Christian dogma was developed, and heresy (deviation from dogma) became a crime against the state. The Empire energetically destroyed heretical writings about Christ and murdered people who insisted on a different view of him. Theodosius I took the extraordinary step of causing his armies to burn the Alexandrian Library— an institution that contained much of the written knowledge then extant in the western world. In many ways, it is a miracle that any information about Jesus survived at all.

Further evidence supporting the reality of Christ comes from the New Testament letters attributed to Paul and the 1945 discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library. These writings show that earliest Christianity was torn apart by major controversies over what Jesus really taught. In *1 Corinthians* (written *c.*A.D. 55), the writer laments that there were Christians who did not believe in Jesus' resurrection: "Now if this is what we proclaim, that Christ was raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" (*1 Corinthians* 15:12, REB). Belief in the resurrection was the core of Paul's theology: "If there is no resurrection, then Christ was not raised; and if Christ was not raised, then our gospel is null and void, and so too is your faith..." (*1 Corinthians* 15:13-14, REB). A later epistle bearing Paul's name further denounces those leaders who taught a different version of Christianity. They were sarcastically labeled "superapostles" because they deemed themselves more knowledgeable than Paul:

> For if someone comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it well enough. For I think that I am not in any way inferior to these "superapostles." Even if I am untrained in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.
>
> *2 Corinthians* 11:4-5 (NAB)

If Jesus had been a complete myth invented by Paul and his cronies, there would have been no basis to believe that Christ did or taught anything except what Paul said. The fact that people were disputing Paul's version of Christ before the New Testament gospels were written strongly suggests that there was a real Jesus.

Some scholars believe that the "superapostles" were latecomers who rejected some elements of Paul's teachings but otherwise accepted his Christ myth. Two of the five English-language Bibles consulted for this book translate the word "someone" in the above quote ("For if *someone* comes and preaches another Jesus...") as "some newcomer" (REB) and "any chance comer" (NJB). However, when an early Greek version is consulted, it is clear that the generic "someone" was intended. (See *The Interlinear Bible* and *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.*) This means that people who disputed Paul's teachings were not necessarily newcomers.

Perhaps the most important clue to indicate the reality of Jesus is the very thing that many debunkers use to deny it: the discrepancies and contradictions in the New Testament gospels. In *The Christ,* Remsberg lists more than six hundred of them. Jesus skeptic G. A. Wells notes, "It is sometimes argued, in favor of the general reliability of the gospels, that they are full of contradictions and anomalies which no writer of fiction would have gratuitously invented."[2] For example, *Mark* is anxious to blame the Jews for Christ's death, but then the author has Jesus die at the hands of the Romans. This seems to thwart the author's purpose to create anti-Jewish antagonism. Wells concludes:

> The brief answer is that he was certainly not making it all up, but reworking an earlier tradition which blamed the Romans. Each Christian writer did not start with a completely clean slate, with freedom to say what he liked: he respected to some extent existing traditions.[3]

> Mark, then, was not an inventor but a redactor [*i.e.,* editor or reviser] of traditions; these came to him, not in the form of an earlier gospel but as short, unconnected units from a great variety of sources, oral and written, after they had been used in the teaching and preaching of the very earliest church.[4]

The gospel authors traveled different roads in order to spread the "good news" to different communities. When they later wrote for their particular audiences, it is natural that many details would be remembered differently. They could have hardly known that their stories would be picked apart by scholars thousands of years later.

Another gospel feature indicating a real Christ are some of the human details about him:

1. There was a period of estrangement between Jesus and his family. In *Luke* 8:19-21, Mary and Jesus' brothers wanted to see him, but he rebuffed them: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it." (*Luke* 11:21, NAB). This puzzling statement is explained in *Mark* 3:21. Jesus had been traveling through his hometown, and when "his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" (NAB). *John* 6:3 confirms that Christ's brothers did not believe in what he was preaching. Jesus was, quite simply, an embarrassment to his family. There was no good reason for the gospel writers to invent such a story.

2. The basic tenet of the New Testament is that Christ was the Jewish Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. It is therefore curious that Jesus forbade his Twelve Apostles from announcing that fact to the public. (See *Matthew* 16:17-20, *Mark* 8:27-30, *Luke* 9:20-22). In *Mark* 12:35-37 and *Luke* 20:41-44, Jesus played down the importance of Davidic descent even though such a lineage was necessary if Jews were to accept him as their Messiah. *John* 6:14-15 reports that Jesus fled a crowd that tried to hail him as The Prophet. On those occasions when Christ admitted that he was the Messiah,

he was alone with the Apostles or in a closed trial, but he was never in public. Why? Did he have self-doubts? Was he afraid of being persecuted by the Romans or Jewish authorities if he publicly announced his status as Messiah? If so, then he revealed a state of mind or instinct for self-perservation that the gospel authors would not have likely placed in him if they had simply made him up.

Many details in the New Testament gospels are historically accurate. Although there are crucifixion myths attached to earlier deities, the fact remains that the Romans did crucify people. Some archaeologists believe that they have discovered sites where gospel events occurred, such as the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed a sick man (*John* 5:1-16) and the court where he was put on trial.

As for the Missing Years, they may help prove Christ's existence. As we will see in chapters to come, there are many unorthodox writings and traditions that neatly fill in the gaps, but they damage the Pauline image of Christ*. This points to the existence of a man whose actual life was, to some extent, a problem to the people who wanted to construct a particular theology around him. The true Jesus did not fit neatly into their scheme, but that kind of problem inevitably happens when myths are built around real persons.

There remains a small but intriguing detail that further weighs in favor of a real Jesus. According to the gospels, at least one woman, and possibly as many as three or more, were the first eyewitnesses to arrive at the tomb and discover that Jesus had disappeared. (See *Matthew* 28:1-7 (two women), *Mark* 16:1-7 (three women), *Luke* 24:1-11 (at least three women), *John* 20:1-2 (one woman)). Their testimony is critical to the story that Jesus died and was miraculously resurrected. It would have been foolish to

* Paul also had missing years after his supernatural vision of A.D. 32 or 33. In *Galatians*, Paul accounts for some of that time by telling us that he traveled and stayed with apostle Peter in Jerusalem for fifteen days. He also met Jesus' brother James. After those introductions, he went off to Syria and Cilicia. Eleven to fourteen years of missing time followed whereupon he returned to Jerusalem, met with Christian leader Barnabas, and began preaching. The missing time gave Paul ample opportunity to study other religions.

make up this important episode using women as sources. A woman's word accounted for little in those days, and they were not permitted to testify in Jewish courts. Since the Jews were an important target audience, it would have been smarter to allege that one or more *male* followers had discovered the empty tomb.

All of this has inspired historians and writers to embark on a quest to unearth the "historical Jesus" — a search that has gone on for millennia. If Christ was not the man described in the gospels, then who was he?

Was he a wise prophet of high ideals who preached a vital message for humanity?

Was he a delusional man who was easily manipulated by others for their own purposes?

Is there another truth about Jesus still waiting to be discovered?

Some people feel threatened by this search because of a strange quality shared by many religions: their prophets must be spiritually or psychologically perfect, or at least superior to other human beings, in order for the teachings to be valid. However, we are all imperfect and yet we benefit every day from each other's efforts. A bus driver may be a miserable spouse at home, but job experience makes him/her a dependable source of transportation. There is no reason to demand an impossibly high standard for religious leaders. A truth is a truth no matter who utters it, and we are foolish to reject any spiritual pearls that are handed to us. If the search for the historical Jesus uncovers evidence that he was flawed, even deeply, that will not diminish the value of any truths that are found in Christianity. Some people fear that a less-than-perfect Christ means a less-than-perfect God, but if God is our spiritual parent as so many religions teach, then why must our Parent be perfect? Are human parents perfect? Truth is whatever it is, and everything is to be gained by finding it.

Image

The meal at *La La Landa* was delicious, but Orion needed to focus on business. If an hour of his time did not produce at least a quarter million dollars for a client (and a commission to GTA), it was time wasted. Yet there was a question that had started nagging at him.

"Joe," he said, "I'm not putting myself down here, but there is one thing that I don't get. If you're really Christ, and God is behind you on this Second Coming, then you don't need me. Why did you stop what you were doing to fly out here?"

"I welcome every person who desires to help. I also plan to meet someone who is very important to me while I am here. My time is not being wasted."

"Alright," Orion said. "I'm still not totally sold, but I'll take a chance on you. If you are who you say you are, then you're starting with a big advantage, and that's instant name recognition. There's just one problem: your image is so strong that we can't build it from scratch. We'll need to mold it to fit today's market. So tell me, Joe, in your opinion, what is the image that most people have of you?"

"That I am a Jew."

Chapter 7

Jesus: The Jew

Do sparrows fly?
Is the Pope Catholic?
Was Jesus a Jew?

That Christ was Jewish is one of those taken-for-granted beliefs that few people question. *Matthew* and *Luke* tell us that he was descended from King David. Christ spoke to the Jews in their own temples, and he told people to follow the Jewish law. Many believers see him as the Jewish Suffering Servant predicted in *Isaiah* 52:13-53-12. In *Jesus the Jew,* Geza Vermes postulates Christ as a *hasid*—a particularly devout and quarrelsome Jew.

Like today, first-century Judaism had different schools of thought, and Jews varied in social status and temperament. Where was Christ's place in all of this?

Jesus the Peasant Jew

Was he a peasant from the lower classes? Jesus is said to have been born in a lowly cave or animal stall, raised by a humble carpenter father. As an adult, he lived with barely more than a robe on his back. Christ may have been deeply affected as a youth when he saw the tremendous disparity in life styles between the upper and lower classes. He spoke about the foolishness of seeking wealth and proclaimed how difficult it is for rich people to attain the kingdom of God. Christ practiced what he preached by welcoming societies' outcasts into his ministry, and he used his healing powers to help rich and poor alike.

Jesus the Royal Jew

A contrasting theory is that Jesus was a wealthy Jew of royal descent who voluntarily chose a life of poverty. That is the impression Paul gave when he wrote, "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich [in spirit]." (2 *Corinthians* 8:9, NRSV). The gospels claim that Christ was a direct descendant of the Hebrew kings (the House of David), and if true, he would have been of royal blood. *John* 2:1-12 describes a wedding banquet attended by Jesus and his family, sug-

gesting that they were accustomed to hobnobbing with well-to-do people. A fifteenth century book *Legenda Aurea* ("Golden Legend") retells an early tradition that three close friends of Christ, namely Martha, Magdalene, and Lazarus, were from a wealthy family: Martha's estate included a castle, along with property in Jerusalem. *Luke* reveals that Christ was literate and even scholarly, which was an attainment usually reserved for priests and the wealthy. As we will see in later chapters, there are persistent legends that mother Mary was descended from royal blood and that Joseph of Arimathea— the wealthy and powerful man who secured Christ's body from the cross—was her uncle. Jesus' father, though called a carpenter, may have been more of a builder or contractor.

A rich man from the House of David claiming to be King of the Jews would have posed a threat to the powers-that-be in Palestine. In *Psalms*, the Old Testament made it very clear that David's dynasty would be God's royal representatives on Earth, and Jerusalem was to be the earthly seat of God's throne. The Jews would accept nothing less. The Roman Senate, of course, disregarded all of that when it confirmed Herod the Great (37-4 B.C.) as King of Judaea. Herod then married a Jewish princess, converted to Judaism, and claimed the title King of the Jews. Despite Herod's efforts to ingratiate himself with the Jewish population such as by rebuilding the temple complex in Jerusalem, he was simply not from the house of David and was too cozy with the Romans. Herod resorted to holding his power ruthlessly, even by executing one of his ten wives, several sons, and a number of extended family members. The New Testament says that he ordered the murder of all male children in Bethlehem aged two and under when he learned about the birth of Christ*. He was not a man who ignored challenges to his kingship.

* Many historians doubt that this massacre happened since there is no mention of it in non-Biblical sources. *Matthew* is the only gospel to discuss the event, and it may have been another stretch of interpretation by *Matthew's* author who connects it to another Old Testament passage, namely *Jeremiah* 31:15. *Matthew* 2:16 quotes *Jeremiah* as a prediction of the Herodian massacre, but it actually describes the suffering of the Jews centuries earlier. On the other hand, Bethlehem was only a village with an estimated population of 300 to 1000. The number of male children aged two and under would have been small, probably fewer than twenty, and their deaths at Roman hands could have fallen below the radar of contemporary writers.

If Herod did have the children killed, then it would mean that Jesus was probably born in 6 B.C. Herod died 4 B.C., and the massacre supposedly took place near the end of his life two years after Christ's birth. A rare alignment of planets happened on April 17, 6 B.C. that could have created the appearance of a bright light in the sky and/or had astrological significance, resulting in the Star of Bethlehem phenomenon. The Herodian massacre and planet alignment are in perfect accord with each other.

When Herod the Great died, power was split amongst his sons who became the region's tetrarchs (rulers who divide power). Herod Antipas (*c.*21 B.C.-A.D. 39) governed Galilee and Perea. Galilee was Jesus' home and base of operations. Antipas continued the delicate act of preserving autonomy over his lands while yielding to the needs of Rome, but he lacked zeal in hunting down Rome's enemies, and that often made Galilee a safe haven for religious and political malcontents.

Another relatively safe area was the adjoining region to the northeast governed by Antipas' popular half-brother Philip the Tetrarch (4 B.C.-A.D. 34). Philip's region was sparsely populated and mostly Gentile. Three of the Twelve Apostles (Andrew, Peter, and Philip) are said in *John* 1:43-44 to have come from there. Jesus occasionally retreated to Philip's domain to conduct his ministry.

Although Herod Antipas did not energetically pursue Rome's enemies, he was like his father by not tolerating threats to his own authority. The New Testament says that he ordered the arrest and beheading of John the Baptist and participated in the hearings that led to Jesus' crucifixion.

The story of Christ's arraignment before Antipas is told in *Luke* only. Herod happened to be in Jerusalem (probably for the Passover celebration since he was a Jew) when Jesus was arrested. According to the New Testament, Antipas merely ridiculed Christ and sent him back to Pilate. Pilate declared that neither he nor Herod found Jesus guilty of any capital crime. Nevertheless, at the insistence of various Jews, Pilate sentenced Jesus to death.

One problem with this story is that the arraignment and trial come across as shams. The people involved seemed to be going through motions knowing what the outcome would be. It was all too easy for Pilate and Herod to play innocent by supposedly yielding to the will of Jewish priests and mobs even though they did not need to. The two rulers were powerful enough to simply release their prisoner. History reports that Pilate regularly goaded and outraged the Jews, so he would have been more inclined to free Jesus to annoy them unless he had is own reasons for desiring Christ's demise.

To some theorists, Jesus is the tale of dynastic intrigue. The puppet "King of the Jews" (Herod) was in power, and he conspired to kill the true successor to the throne, namely Jesus, with the help of the hated Romans. It would have been politics as usual in that day and age.

Jesus the Political/Militant Jew

One of the great debates about Christ is the level of his political consciousness. Even if he belonged to the House of David, was he really interested in a political career?

The New Testament gospels are fuzzy on this question. Jesus often comes across as someone who was more interested in healing people and offering them a spiritual message. The trouble was, the message of God's kingdom has always been interpreted by mainstream Jews to include an actual political kingdom on Earth governed from Jerusalem by God's appointee. Occupiers like the Romans would be gone. If Jesus proclaimed that he was establishing God's kingdom, Jews would expect him to end Roman rule. For these reasons, Christ would have been forced to accept the political agenda that came with the title of Messiah. Perhaps that is why he chose the week of Passover (which celebrates the event that finally liberated the Jews from Egyptian bondage) as the time to enter Jerusalem and proclaim God's kingdom. He may have really thought, and gambled, that God would magically terminate the Roman occupation and put him in charge. Instead, he was promptly crucified, and Rome maintained its hold.

The Apostles may also offer clues into Christ's political leanings. For example, *Matthew* calls Apostle Simon a Zealot. Does this mean that he was an especially fervent devotee of Christ, or did he

belong to the Jewish revolutionary party called the Zealots? The Zealots were militant Jews who violently opposed Roman rule in the Middle East. They preached a future day of salvation and believed that their acts of insurrection were part of God's master plan. Most Christian scholars think that Simon was a member of this group. Another of The Twelve was Judas Iscariot whose surname could mean "a man from Kerioth," but the *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* points out that it may have come from the Latin *sicarius* meaning "dagger man" (or "dagger bearer"). The "dagger men" were called the *Sicarii*—a cadre of Zealots who carried out bold assassinations by stabbing their victims with a short dagger. The killings were usually committed in crowded places or at public functions where the hit men could instantly vanish into a crowd. There were periods of time when these murders occurred almost daily. If Jesus had Zealots in his closest circle, he could have been a member or sympathizer. Galilee was an important sanctuary for the Zealots just as it was for Christ.

"Jesus the Zealot" is an uncertain theory. "Iscariot" may have roots in other less sinister words. Jesus gave women important roles in his ministry, and this makes it unlikely that he was fronting for Zealots and dagger men. It is certainly possible that he attracted some militants to his circle, but his teachings about turning the other cheek and giving to Caesar what is Caesar's did not fit the militants too well.

Jesus the Liberal Jew

Although Jesus had his moments of anger, the New Testament portrays him as a remarkably tolerant individual. Had he been raised in a liberal tradition?

During Christ's youth, there lived in Jerusalem a Jewish teacher named Hillel. The New Testament does not mention Hillel, but some scholars speculate that Christ may have studied under him or learned of his teachings during the Missing Years. Hillel was a descendant of King David (although born into a poor family), and this may have given him a family tie to Christ. He probably died when Jesus was in his early or mid-teens.

Hillel was famous for his mastery of Jewish law, and also for his kindness. His most famous lesson is that all Jewish moral law boils down to the Golden Rule: What is hateful to you, do not

do to your neighbor—everything else is mere commentary. *Matthew* 22:37-40 quotes Jesus making a similar pronouncement:

> You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments. (NAB)

Christ's adult behavior reflects Hillel's teachings about property ("the more property, the more anxiety") and the relationship between ethics and peace ("the more righteousness, the more peace"). Hillel was not an absolutist and believed that rules based on the Jewish scriptures can be changed in response to new conditions. On occasion, Jesus could also be flexible about Jewish law. (See, *e.g., John* 8:3-11.)

Jesus the Socialistic/Communistic Jew

Back in the days when the world was more open to the philosophy of communism, Jesus was occasionally held up as a role model for that way of life. He and the Apostles put their money into a common pool and disbursed it according to need. Some Christians in Western countries with a cradle-to-grave system of care for its citizens (socialism) find support in the example of community set by Christ and the Apostles. This is in sharp contrast to fundamentalist Christianity in the United States where Christ is frequently invoked to condemn communism and socialism, usually because atheism is more prevalent in societies which embrace those philosophies. Jesus did say some things about money, especially in regard to the ills that befall people who obsessively pursue it, but he is not quoted as advocating any particular economic system.

There has been a tremendous amount of scholarship about the quality and extent of Christ's Jewishness, and a person could spend a lifetime studying it. When most scholars put forth alternative theories about Christ, they usually begin with the premise that Jesus was a Jew and propose variations on that theme. There is one point on which many of those writers agree, and that is that Christ's Jewishness was unorthodox. The gospels report that Jesus sharply rebuked religious experts, and his ministry was clearly outside the

mainstream. The title of John Meyer's book seems to aptly describe Christ's relationship to Judaism: *A Marginal Jew.*

Lead Time

Orion returned with Joe to the office for a meeting with GTA's publicity virtuoso, Brenda Hartsong. She was a struggling independent publicist when she had caught Orion's professional eye. She had managed to generate extraordinary press for a one-legged trucker who came to blows with an NBA basketball star over a brothel prostitute in Nevada. Brenda made the story seem important enough to warrant nightly coverage on the cable news channels, and it was tabloid fodder for months.

"Ryan, have you flipped?" Brenda chided her boss. She and Orion were seated in her office while Joe waited outside.

"I've heard the rumors, too," she continued, "but we'll be a laughing stock if he turns out to be a phony. You're risking our entire agency on him."

"I agree. I want you to develop a publicity plan as though he's the real thing, but we won't launch until we know for sure."

Orion ushered Joe into Brenda's office and introduced them.

"Can you have something for me by Monday?" Orion asked her.

"I'm going to need more time," Brenda fretted. "Do you really expect me to finalize a publicity plan for Christ's Second Coming in one weekend? The minimum to get a prime time special is three months. Maybe I'm just dreaming here, but I'd like to aim at getting Joe into *People* magazine's '25 Most Fascinating People of the Year' issue, and you know what a mountain that is to climb."

"Well, that may be too much too soon," Orion cautioned. "Joe, we can't promise you that issue of *People*."

"Certainly," Joe agreed. "There are billions of fascinating people in this world."

"That's, uh, not exactly what I mean," Orion stammered, "but let's keep working on your image. You said the most common perception about you is that you're a Jew."

"I suppose that's a start," Brenda sighed. "Can we elaborate on that a bit?"

Chapter 8

Jesus: The Essene

It was a hot summer day by the Dead Sea in the harsh Qumran valley just fifteen miles east of Jerusalem. The year was 1947, and a Bedouin boy named Muhammad Adh-Dhib was tending a herd of goats entrusted to his care. One wandered away and climbed a craggy cliff, so the boy scaled the heights to recover it. As he climbed, young Muhammad discovered a small entranceway to a cave. Inside were ancient clay jars containing one of the most dramatic archaeological discoveries of the 20th century: the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

News of the discovery impelled profit-hungry Bedouins and knowledge-thirsty archaeologists to seek more caves where additional scrolls and fragments were to be found, all of them written at various times between 250 B.C. and 68 A.D., *i.e.*, before, during and after the lifetime of Christ.

The best guess is that the scrolls were part of a religious library that had been assembled by an isolated sect that lived in a nearby settlement at Qumran*. Some of the Scrolls and fragments contain portions of the Old Testament, and other writings are unique. Many historians believe that Qumran was destroyed by the Roman Tenth Legion in A.D. 68 as it marched towards Jerusalem. The Dead Sea Scrolls were probably hidden in the nearby caves by Qumran members in response to the danger.

The people of ancient Qumran are generally believed to have been members of a sect called the Essenes, although there is some debate about this, as we shall see later. The origin of the word

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* No documents similar to the Dead Sea Scrolls have been discovered at the Qumran settlement, and so the connection between the Scrolls and the Qumran sect is not absolutely certain. In spring 1996, a pottery fragment was discovered in the Qumran ruins containing an inscription that seems to provide the missing link between the Scrolls and Qumran. There is, however, a debate about how the pottery piece was translated. The controversy is well-covered in the magazine *Biblical Archaeology Review*.

"Essene" is uncertain, but it may come from the Aramaic *assayya* ("physician") which corresponds to the Greek *essenoi.* Josephus states that the Essenes numbered about four thousand members, and so the Qumran community (which housed about two hundred) may have been an Essene congregation.

Although none of the Dead Sea Scrolls specifically mention Jesus, their contents give us pause to ask, was he an Essene and/or member of the sect at Qumran?

According to Josephus, there were three major Jewish sects during Christ's era: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

The Pharisees were the largest and most popular of the three sects. According to the New Testament, Jesus had the support of two influential Pharisees: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. *Acts* 5:34-39 and 23:6-9 report that some Pharisees defended the early Christian Church after Christ's death. Pharisees believed in the possibility of physical resurrection after death, and this is now a cornerstone of Christian faith. Other Pharisee doctrines also found a home in Christianity including a belief in angels, "divine providence" (*i.e.,* God's care of humanity), and freedom of the human will. It is surprising then to read what Jesus had to say about the Pharisees:

> But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.
>
> *Matthew* 23:13-15 (NRSV)

Whew! It is safe to say that Jesus did not consider himself a Pharisee.

The Sadducees were a sect for wealthy Jews and temple priests. They often cooperated with the Roman occupiers. Sadducees denied the possibility of physical resurrection and the immortality of the soul. The New Testament reports only a handful of encounters between Jesus and the Sadducees, and the Sadducees were hostile to Christ's teachings.

By process of elimination, we are left with the Essenes. It is, of course, possible that Jesus was an unaffiliated Jew, but the Essene connection seems strong.

There are three known historians from the first century A.D. who wrote about the Essenes: Pliny the Elder, Philo Judaeus, and Josephus. Pliny's short account is considered inaccurate, and so historians rely more on the other two.

Philo Judaeus

Philo was a scholar and contemporary of Christ. He wrote two descriptions of the Essenes before A.D. 40. His first summary is found in *Every Good Man is Free,* and it reveals many similarities to Jesus' way of life:

> In this country [Judaea and Syria] live a considerable part of the very populous nation of the Jews, including as it is said, certain persons, more than four thousand in number, called Essenes. Their name which is, I think, a variation, though the form of the Greek is inexact, of ["holiness"], is given them, because they have shown themselves especially devout in the service of God, not by offering sacrifices of animals, but by resolving to sanctify [*i.e.,* spiritually purify] their minds. The first thing about these people is that they live in villages and avoid the cities because of the iniquities which have become inveterate [*i.e.,* habitual] among city dwellers, for they know that their company would have a deadly effect upon their own souls, like a disease brought by a pestilential atmosphere. Some of them labour on the land and others pursue such crafts as cooperate with peace and so benefit themselves and their neighbours. They do not hoard gold and silver or acquire great slices of land because they desire the revenues therefrom, but provide what is needed for the necessary requirements of life. For while they stand almost alone in the whole of mankind in that they have become moneyless and landless by deliberate action rather than by lack of good fortune, they are esteemed exceedingly rich, because they judge frugality with contentment to be, as indeed it is, an abundance of wealth. As for [deadly] darts, javelins, daggers, or the helmet, breastplate or shield, you could not find a single manufacturer of them, nor in general, any person making weapons or engines [of war] or plying any industry con-

cerned with war, nor, indeed, any of the peaceful kind which easily lapse into vice, for they have not the vaguest idea of commerce either wholesale or retail or marine, but pack the inducements to covetousness off in disgrace. Not a single slave is to be found among them, but all are free, exchanging services with each other, and they denounce the owners of slaves, not merely for their injustice in outraging the law of equality, but also for their impiety [*i.e.*, wickedness] in annulling the statute of Nature,* who mother-like has born and reared all men alike, and created them genuine brothers....[1]

Philo also informs us that the Essenes rejected certain philosophies but retained:

...that part which treats philosophically of the existence of God and the creation of the universe. But the ethical part they study very industriously, taking for their trainers the laws of their fathers, which could not possibly have been conceived by the human soul without divine inspiration.[2]

Essenes maintained the Sabbath and worshipped in synagogues:

...most of their philosophical study takes the form of allegory [*i.e.*, a story with an underlying meaning; parable], and in this they emulate the tradition of the past.

...they all have a single treasury and common disbursements; their clothes are held in common and also their food through their institution of public meals. In no other community can we find the custom of sharing roof, life and board more firmly established in actual practice. And that is no more than one would expect. For all the wages which they earn in the day's work they do not keep as their private property, but throw them into the common stock and allow the benefit thus accruing to be shared by those

* The "statute of Nature" was a philosophical concept that all people are spiritually equal before God and therefore no person should be a slave.

who wish to use. The sick are not neglected because they cannot provide anything, but have the cost of their treatment lying ready in the common stock, so that they can meet expenses out of the greater wealth in full security. To the elder men too is given the respect and care which real children give to their parents, and they receive from countless hands and minds a full and generous maintenance for their latter years.[3]

Philo informs us that even the most frightful despots allowed the Essenes to live as self-governing free persons.

In *Hypothetica,* Philo adds more information:

Furthermore, they eschew marriage because they clearly discern it to be the sole or the principal danger to the maintenance of the communal life, as well as because they particularly practice continence [*i.e.*, sexual abstinence].

...

Such then is the life of the Essenes, a life so highly to be prized that not only commoners but also great kings look upon them with admiration and amazement, and the approbation [*i.e.*, approval] and honours which they give add further veneration to their venerable name.[4]

Philo's description of Essene life mirrors Christ's existence to a remarkable extent. If we had to assign Christ to one of the three major Jewish sects, then the Essenes would, hands down, be our first choice.

Flavius Josephus

In his autobiography *Life of Flavius Josephus,* Josephus reveals that he was an Essene during his youth. Like young people today who explore different spiritual paths, Josephus was curious about the major Jewish sects, and so he enrolled in each one between the ages of 16 and 19. He finally settled on becoming a Pharisee*.

* Josephus had also followed a local guru named Banus who lived in the desert, dressed himself from trees, ate no other food than what grew on its

Josephus confirms many details told by Philo about the Essenes. Josephus says that the Essene life style was similar to the Pythagoreans who were a sect of philosophers and their families that lived monastically and devoted their lives to the attainment of spiritual wisdom. Their founder was Greek philosopher Pythagoras (born *c.*586 B.C.) who was famous for his teaching about the transmigration of souls, *i.e.*, reincarnation. He is also known for his mathematical concept known as the Pythagorean Theorem.

Josephus compares Essene beliefs to those of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In regard to fate, the Essenes had an "everything-is-determined-by-fate" philosophy which is echoed by the "everything-is-determined-by-God" belief of many Christians:

> Now for the Pharisees, they say that some actions, but not all, are the work of fate, and some of them are in our own power, and that they are liable to fate, but are not caused by fate. But the sect of the Essenes affirm, that fate governs all things, and that nothing befalls men but what is according to its determination. And for the Sadducees, they take away fate, and say there is no such thing, and that the events of human affairs are not at its disposal; but they suppose that all our actions are in our power, so that we are ourselves the causes of what is good, and receive what is evil from our own folly.[5]

Some Essenes were famous for being able to foretell the future: "...many of these Essens have, by their excellent virtue, been thought worthy of this knowledge of divine revelations."[6] This was another quality attributed to Christ.

Essenes were not welcome in the mainstream temples, and this might explain why Jesus seemed to be an outsider as well:

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own, and bathed in cold water night and day to stifle his libido. Banus' life style seemed to be modeled after John the Baptist who is mentioned favorably by Josephus as a "good man" in *Antiquities of the Jews* (Book XVIII, chap. V. v. 2). It is therefore possible that Josephus had heard about John the Baptist (and hence Jesus) through Banus. This is indirect evidence that Josephus' words about Christ may have been his own and not a forgery as discussed in chapter 3.

> The doctrine of the Essenes is this: That all things are best ascribed to [*i.e.*, created by] God. They teach the immortality of souls*, and esteem that the rewards of righteousness are to be earnestly striven for; and when they send what they have dedicated to God into the temple, they do not offer sacrifices, because they have more pure lustrations [*i.e.*, ceremonial washings; baptisms]; on which account they are excluded from the common court of the temple [*i.e.*, Essenes were excluded from mainstream Jewish rituals]...[8]

Josephus' longest description of the Essenes is contained in *Wars of the Jews* (ca. 78 A.D.). They sound remarkably like Catholic monks and nuns:

> [The Essenes] are Jews by birth and seem to have a greater affection for one another than the other sects have. These Essenes reject pleasures as an evil; instead, they practice abstinence from sexual pleasure and believe that it is virtuous to conquer our passions. They neglect wedlock, but choose out other persons' children while they are pliable and fit for learning. Essenes treat these children like their own family and raise them to follow Essene ways. Essenes do not absolutely deny the role of marriage in human life since the continuation of mankind is thereby produced...[9]

Essenes dressed in simple white garments and shoes that were used until worn out. The sect was scattered throughout all of the cities, and for that reason its members did not need to travel with food or money: "...if any of their sect come from other places, what they have lies open for them, just as if it were their own..."[10] An Essene was appointed in every city to take care of brethren traveling through. The only necessity on the road was a weapon to

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* In comparison, we learn from Josephus that the Sadducees believed that souls die with the bodies. The Pharisees taught that "souls have an immortal vigour in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter [*i.e.*, vicious people] are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former [*i.e.*, virtuous people] shall have power to revive and live again."[7]

protect against thieves.

Essenes were educated by passing through four levels of initiation. The top and bottom were considered so far apart that initiates at the bottom were not permitted to touch those at the top. An Essene senior who touched a junior had to wash himself.

The daily life of a typical Essene brother consisted of prayers, working at a job for which he was best suited, bathing, and dining. Essenes were taught to be courteous and not to spit in each other's presence. Every Essene was given a chance to speak in his turn, and so there was never any "clamor or disturbance to pollute their house."[11] The resulting quietness was like a great mystery to outsiders who entered the enclaves.

Cleanliness was vital, and even the natural act of a bowel movement was considered a defilement. When an Essene had to defecate, he dug a small pit, covered himself with a garment so that he would "not affront the divine rays of light,"[12] and refilled the hole. Washing afterwards was required.

If we are to believe Josephus, the Essene way of life and diet frequently led to long life. It was not uncommon for a member to survive his hundredth birthday.

Essenes studied a wide variety of teachings and devoted substantial time to the healing arts:

> They also take great pains in studying the writings of the ancients, and choose out of them what is most for the advantage of their soul and body; and they inquire after such roots and medicinal stones as may cure their distempers [*i.e.*, illnesses].[13]

Essene brothers were taught to be just in dispensing their anger, and Josephus calls them "ministers of peace."[14] They did not give oaths to outsiders since their word was considered inviolate. During war, Essenes clung to their vows and customs even if it meant torture and death.

To ensure fairness in matters of law, Essene courts consisted of a hundred men. If an Essene was found guilty of a heinous sin, he was excommunicated. This could result in a miserable death by starvation since many ejected Essenes would remain faithful to the custom of not eating anything not given to them by other Essenes.

Excommunicated members on the brink of death were sometimes accepted back into the fold. Essenes were extremely harsh in regard to one matter: any person who blasphemed the name of their "legislator" (presumably Moses) was put to death.

Essenes maintained libraries and took vows to preserve them. Their inner teachings were maintained in secrecy, and initiates swore never to divulge their knowledge to outsiders even at the threat of death. They also promised not to reveal the names of the angels that were said to be living among them. Nevertheless, some Essene teachings have come to light, including from Josephus who provides a summary of the Essene idea of salvation:

> For their doctrine is this: That bodies are corruptible, and that the matter they are made of is not permanent; but that the souls are immortal, and continue forever; and that they come out of the most subtile air, and are united to their bodies as in prisons, into which they are drawn by a certain natural enticement; but that when they are set free from the bonds of the flesh, they then, as released from a long bondage, rejoice and mount upward.[15]

Josephus closes his discussion by pointing to the existence of "another order of Essenes, who agree with the rest as to their way of living, and customs, and laws, but differ from them in the point of marriage..."[16] Those other Essenes allowed nuptials and childbearing, but spouses were expected to minimize sexual pleasure. They even had to be clothed when they bathed.

The Dead Sea Scrolls reflect some, but not all, of the data provided by Philo and Josephus. In fact, there are enough differences between the Scrolls and Josephus' Essenes that some scholars doubt they were connected. For example, the Scrolls reflected warlike attitudes and permitted slavery. Excavations at Qumran yielded trappings of wealth like luxurious glassware, fancy stone vessels, and hoards of coins. Essenes or not, the people of the Scrolls did seem to have some influence on the formation of Christianity:

1. There are some direct parallels between words in the gospels and the Scrolls. Compare, *e.g.*, *Matthew* 11:4-5/*Luke* 7:22-23 and Scroll #4Q521 in which a future Messiah will resurrect the dead and announce glad tidings to the poor.

2. One of the oldest Scroll writings, "Rule of the Community," also predicts a future Messiah. The following events will lead up to the big day: "...they [*i.e.*, certain prophets] shall separate from the midst of the dwelling of perverse men to go into the wilderness to prepare there the way of him; as it is written, 'In the wilderness prepare the way of Yahweh'."[17] That is precisely what John the Baptist did when he went into the wilderness to prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah. *John* 1:28 and 3:23 indicate that he may have been just north of Qumran when he did so.

3. Unlike the Essenes described by Philo and Josephus, the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls were very apocalyptic. Much of their eschatology (end-of-the-world beliefs) was based on *Isaiah* 40:3. A late version of the scroll called Manual of Discipline anticipates a future battle between Good and Evil that would herald the arrival of two messiahs: the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel. The Messiah of Israel would be a descendant of David and would lead the forces of Light in a final war against the powers of Darkness which are commanded by the devil Belial. During the apocalyptic era, many wars and revolutions would occur, but God would eventually reign supreme on Earth. One of the two messiahs will control the administration of Earth and the other will direct humanity's spiritual progress. Earlier scrolls speak of a single Davidic warrior priest, so the idea of two Messiahs may have been developed later.

4. According to the Scrolls, a key figure in early Qumran history was an unnamed "Teacher of Righteousness" who was in conflict with a "Wicked Priest." The Teacher of Righteousness is guessed to have been a Jerusalem temple priest who lived before 150 B.C. After a rift in his priesthood, the Righteous Teacher led a small congregation to the Dead Sea where he founded the Qumran community. According to the Scrolls, the Righteous Teacher established a "new covenant" with God, and any person accepted into Qumran was said to be entering into this covenant. This concept is similar to the New Covenant idea that lies at the heart of Christianity, which is based largely on *Jeremiah* 31:31-34: "'The time is coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.'" (NIV).

5. Only Jesus and Qumranites are known to have used the term "sons of light" and expression "poor in spirit."

6. The term "Holy Spirit" is rarely found in the Old Testament and Jewish apocrypha, but it frequently appears in the New Testament and Qumran writings.

7. In the Last Supper story, Jesus eats a final meal with the Twelve Apostles before his arrest and crucifixion. A similar Final Meal is described in the Qumran "Rule of the Congregation" (2:11-22): the Messiahs will share a special meal with chosen men on the eve of the "last days."

The conclusion now seems inescapable: Jesus was an Essene and/or affiliated with the people of the Scrolls. Perhaps he was taken as a child and raised by the Essenes in the manner described by Josephus. Neither Jesus nor the Essenes would have publicized this fact because the Essenes—or at least the people of the Scrolls—were tight-lipped about their membership. Scholar David Noel Freedman points out, "we cannot be sure from the Dead Sea Scrolls of the actual name of a single Essene."[18*]

Even as an Essene and/or Qumranite, Christ was probably something of a maverick:

1. He did not stay in a closed community but took his ministry on the road and preached to the population at large. He embraced individuals who would never be allowed inside an Essene enclave such as lepers, prostitutes, and other outcasts.

2. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain a dictum that every person who was not affiliated with the Qumran community (*i.e.*, was not a "son of light") was a "son of darkness" who must be hated "ac-

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* Did any Dead Sea Scrolls refer to Jesus? Perhaps by inference. In *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered,* Eisenman suggests that the "Wicked Priest" was Anananus who had ordered the execution of Christ's brother James. Eisenman convinced the Israeli Department of Antiquities to perform a carbon-14 test on some of the relevant documents in 1989, but the results dated them to the second and first centuries B.C., *i.e.,* a century before Jesus' lifetime. The scrolls could not have been about Christ unless he had been born a hundred years earlier than is commonly believed. (And yes, there is a theory to that effect. See *Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.?* by G.R.S. Mead.) In defense of his theory, Eisenman questions the accuracy of carbon-14 techniques. Dr. Barbara Thiering suggests that the Teacher of Righteousness was John the Baptist and the Wicked Priest was Jesus, but few Dead Sea Scrolls scholars share this view.

cording to his sinfulness."[19] Jesus spoke against such teachings:

> You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But what I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?...Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
>
> *Matthew* 5:44-48 (NRSV)

3. Unlike the Essenes, Jesus allowed women to have important roles in his ministry.

4. There are no reports that Jesus excommunicated anyone.

5. Although Christ was an ascetic to some degree (*i.e.*, a person who refrains from sensory gratification), he did not take it as far as the Essenes. He reportedly enjoyed wine, good food, lively company, and the occasional foot massage.

These and other differences could mean a variety of things. Perhaps Jesus was not an Essene at all and merely borrowed some of their ideas. Or he had been raised as an Essene but chose to "go it alone" as an adult. Another possibility is that he remained an Essene but became controversial even within his own sect. These possibilities are supported by gospel reports that Christ and his disciples did not have a network of homes that they could rely on as true Essenes did; instead, Jesus had to instruct his disciples to seek out homes when they traveled, and they were sometimes rejected. (*Matthew* 10:5-15, *Mark* 6:7-11, *Luke* 10:3-12).

How Jewish were the Essenes?

They studied the Jewish Scriptures, and some Essenes called themselves Sons of Zadok after a Jewish high priest who had lived earlier in history. On the other hand, it appears that the Essenes/Sons of Zadok were a metaphysical sect. As noted earlier, Essenes did not follow any single writing but studied "the ancients," and presumably this would have included Gentile texts. The Essenes closely resembled the Pythagoreans who were Hellenistic and not Jewish.

The implications for Christianity are significant if Jesus shared the Essene idea about the body and soul, and the New Testament strongly suggests that he did. *John* 6:46 quotes Jesus as saying that the body and soul are separate creations, and only the soul has value: "the Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." (NIV). Jesus added, "Flesh can only give birth to flesh; it is spirit that gives birth to spirit." (*John* 3:6, REB). Even Paul seemed to be clear on the concept, at least for a while, but it was a source of anguish to him:

> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.
>
> *Philippians* 1:22-24 (NIV)

Paul, or whoever wrote in his name, added that a person must be out-of-body in order to attain a direct union with God, and it is therefore normal for people to want to go out-of-body. Being in a body has negative consequences because the soul can no longer perceive and be with God directly but must rely on a less-satisfying alternative, namely faith:

> Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord [God]. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
>
> *2 Corinthians* 5:6-10 (NIV)

In harmony with Essene teachings, Paul suggested that the soul and the body are inherently in conflict:

> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not

submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:5-8 (NRSV)

...the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other...

Galatians 5:17 (NAB)

Paul explicitly repeats the Essene idea that being in a body makes us prisoners: "Keep in mind those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; and those who are being badly treated, since you too are in the body." (*Hebrews* 13:3, NJB).

Other New Testament writers affirm these concepts. In *2 Peter* we read that we are spirits inhabiting bodies: "...I think it right to keep on reminding you as long as I still lodge in this body. I know I must soon leave it, as our Lord Jesus Christ told me." (1:13, REB). The author of *James* indicates that a body requires a soul in order to live: "...a body without a spirit is dead..." (2:26, NJB).

Paul, or whoever wrote or translated some of the letters bearing this name, managed to muddle the issue of body and soul for all future Christians. In *1 Corinthians* 6:19-20, the writer declares, "Do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you and whom you received from God?...So use your body for the glory of God." (NJB). This body-as-temple idea contradicts the body-as-prison teaching and Christ's statement that "the flesh counts for nothing." Writings attributed to Paul also contradict the pronouncement that spiritual salvation and reunion with God ultimately require an out-of-body state:

We [Christians], by contrast, are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come, and the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transfigure our humble bodies, and give them a form like that of his own glorious body...."

Philippians 3:20 (REB)

Christians now believe that bodies are something to be prized and that the faithful will be attached as souls to special bodies when Christ is back for his Second Coming.

The evidence in this chapter opens the door to another theory: Jesus was a Pythagorean. Some writers believe that the Essenes were actually Pythagoreans who had established a branch in Palestine. When the Greek occupation ended, the Pythagoreans of Judaea may have adopted a Judaic facade to comply with Jewish law. It is also possible that Jesus had learned Pythagorean teachings and incorporated some of those beliefs into an independent system of his own.

Jesus the Essene is probably the most enduring of the alternative theories about Christ. It intrudes on our comfort zone because it provides our first inkling that modern Catholicism and Protestantism may be, to some extent, heresies against Christ's true teachings about the very nature of salvation—a debate that once tore at the fabric of Christianity, as we will see later.

Making Sizzle

Brenda was discouraged.

"Joe," she demanded, "follow me here. This Essene stuff makes for lousy media. What can I do with celibate men in white robes, musty parchments, and Jewish sects that don't exist anymore? Who's going to care other than a few history professors? You can't generate critical mass with that."

"Brenda's right," Orion agreed. "This is the age of big visuals and packaged thinking. People want tabloid news and easy emotions. They want sizzle. They want celebrities. They want fun."

Brenda sighed. "Joe, you're an absolute dear, but is there any way to get away from this whole religion thing?"

She and Orion squinted at him hopefully. Joe cleared his throat.

"I don't think so," he replied.

"OK, OK," Brenda groped for inspiration. "We'll work with it. Ryan, what's new and happening in religion these days?"

"I don't know. A lot of it seems passe or discredited right now. Maybe Kabbalah? Egyptian?..."

"Egyptian!" Brenda exclaimed. "That's our ticket! Think of the visuals: pyramids, pharaohs, mummies, the Sphynx. It's timeless! We can hold a big news conference at the Luxor in Vegas when Joe announces his Second Coming. We'll hire dancers in Nefertiti costumes. The light on top of the Luxor is visible from space. It can symbolize Joe's direct connection to God."

"Not bad," Orion mused. "What do you think, Joe? Can we tie you into Egypt somehow?"

Chapter 9

Jesus: Egyptian Front Man

Ancient Egypt must be the poster child for weird-but-fascinating religion. Its pyramids, mummies, hieroglyphics, and complex ideas still capture our imagination today. Did Jesus have a connection to it all?

To explore this question, begin by choosing the correct answer to this simple quiz:

Jesus was a:

(a) Nazirite (a.k.a. *Nazarite)*
(b) Nazarene
(c) Nasorean (a.k.a. Nazorean and possibly "Naassene")
(d) All of the above
(e) Two of the above
(f) None of the above
(g) Huh?

"Nazarite," "Nazarene," and "Nasorean" look very much alike, so they are often confused. They have all been used at some time to label Christ, but not always correctly. Clarifying this word may be a step towards understanding Jesus.

As discussed in chapter 3, "Nazarite" comes from the Hebrew *nazîr* ("to consecrate" or "separate oneself"). Any Jew, including a woman or slave, could become a Nazirite by following the steps spelled out in *Numbers* 6:1-21: (1) The candidate must not consume wine or anything else that comes from grapevines, (2) must not shave, (3) must not go near dead bodies, and (4) must make certain animal offerings. At the end of a trial period, the candidate's hair was shaved from the head and placed in a ritual fire. The Nazirite would then be allowed to drink wine again.

Was Jesus a Nazirite? Probably not. He drank wine (*Matthew* 26:26-9, *Luke* 7:34) and touched dead bodies (*Matthew* 9:18-25). There is no report in any gospel that he made animal sacrifices or placed spiritual significance on hair. The word "Nazirite" is not used anywhere in the New Testament.

"Nazarene" and "Nasorean" ("Nazorean") were often used interchangeably to mean the same thing. Paul was said to be "a

ringleader of the sect of the Nazoreans." (*Acts* 24:5, NAB). (Other English translations use the term "Nazarene" in this passage).

What was a Nasorean, and why should we care?

As noted in chapter 3, "Nasorean" might come from *ne-ser*, meaning bud or branch. Some scholars, however, trace "Nasorean" to the people called *Nâsôrayê (*or *Nasurai)* who are known today as the sect of the Mandaeans. ("Mandaean" comes from *manda* meaning either "knowledge" or "dwelling.") Today's Mandaean high priests are still called Nasoreans (or "Nasurai," meaning "observers" in the Mandaean language) which was the original name of their sect. They are often classified as a race due to certain physical characteristics and their own ancient language.

About twenty thousand Mandaeans still exist, mostly in southern Iraq and Iran, although political problems in the 1990's caused many to emigrate, and they can now be found as far away as Australia and San Diego, California. Modernization is taking its toll as many younger members find little appeal in Mandaean ways.

There are strong similarities between Mandaeans and early Christians. Mandaeans practice baptism in flowing water, and so they tried to live by moving rivers. They have savior figures with the names Manda-d-Hiia ("Knowledge of Life"), Hibil Ziwa ("a light bearer") and Yawar-Ziwa ("Awakening Light"). Good and evil spirits exist in their cosmology, including those that can be driven out of people's bodies.

A remarkable Mandaean claim is that John the Baptist was an early member of their sect, *i.e.*, he was a Nasurai (Nasorean). As a result, Mandaeans are sometimes called "Christians of St. John." Some of them proclaim John as their "prophet," although this may have started in the seventh century to avoid being forced to convert to Islam after the Moslem conquest. (Sects that declared an acceptable holy book and prophet were exempt from conversion, including some Christian sects.) However, most Mandaeans do not believe that John the Baptist started the Nasorean sect: he was simply a famous member. According to Epiphanius, a sect of "Nasaraeans" existed before Christ as an offshoot of Judaism.

Can Mandaean claims be authenticated? Not entirely. It is impossible to find artifacts of Mandaean existence earlier than the second century A.D. During the centuries that followed, Mandaeans adopted new ideas from surrounding religions, and so it is difficult to pinpoint Mandaean origins by following their belief system. On the other hand, Mandaeans have their own written language which appears traceable to the first century A.D., and that was the century in which John the Baptist and Jesus lived. When their geographic and linguistic history is investigated further, we find that the Mandaeans were probably in the Jordan River area when John the Baptist performed his baptisms there.

The New Testament confirms that John the Baptist was already some sort of sect leader before Jesus went to him, which bolsters the Mandaean claim that he belonged to their group. (See *Matthew* 3:5, *Mark* 1:5, *Luke* 3:7, 18, *John* 1:6-28.) The Mandaeans say that Christ was also a member, and his baptism by John was his initiation into the sect. This provides a good solution to the riddle of the term "Nazarene" and why early Christians were called "Nasoreans" (a.k.a. "Nazoreans," "Nazarenes") by contemporaries.

Does this mean that the Mandaeans revere Christ? Not at all. They denounce him as a false Messiah who betrayed their sect, led people astray, and wrongly revealed secrets that were entrusted to him*. A Mandaean version of Christ's baptism alleges that John the Baptist was unwilling to perform the ceremony but relented when he received a command from heaven to "baptize the liar in the Jordan."[1] *Matthew* 3:13-15 confirms that John was hesitant to baptize Jesus, but for different reasons. John the Baptist's uncertainty about Jesus persisted: when he was in prison he sent his disciples to ask Christ, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (*Matthew* 11:1-3, NIV). John had already performed the baptism long before, and it is unlikely that he would ask such a question unless he still doubted Jesus' Messiahship.

These Mandaean stories, along with the gospel accounts that several disciples left John to join Jesus, suggest that Christ led a splinter group of Nasoreans. Christ's followers continued to be called Nasoreans for a while, especially by the Jews, but eventually everyone would call them Christians**.

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* Mandaeans also put a negative spin on Moses and Muhammad.

** Paul's early persecution of Christians may have been aimed at Nasoreans. See *Acts* 19-1:7 in which he seems to later convert such a group.

How does this fit the evidence that Jesus and John the Baptist were Essenes and/or Qumranites?

One explanation is that the Nasoreans were the second branch of Essenes mentioned by Josephus, *i.e.*, the ones that permitted marriage. Epiphanius stated that the Nasoreans were closely connected to the Essenes (whom he called the "Ossaeanes"). The Nasoreans, who were headquartered at Mount Carmel, may have been a northern branch of Essenes. The two groups certainly had many similarities. Both used "light" in some of their expressions and titles. Traditional Mandaeans wore only white clothing, and they once tried to live apart from society. Both groups view the body as the prison/tomb of the soul. Some people think that "Nasorean" and "Essene" came from the same root words, but this is not certain.

Were Essenes and Nasoreans branches of the same tree? Did they have a common source? Maybe. Both claimed that they were either founded in ancient Egypt or had ties there.

Essenes and Mandaeans had similarities to a mystical practice called Freemasonry. For example, today's Mandaeans use a special ritualistic handshake, initiations, and teachings that resemble Freemasonry. Josephus reveals that ancient Essenes gave their new candidates an apron as part of the acceptance process. Ritual aprons and step-by-step initiations are integral to Freemasonry. Like Freemasons, Essenes kept their teachings secret and engaged in mutual support and assistance.

What exactly is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry (a.k.a. "Masonry") is often classified as a secret society, although little about it is secret anymore, especially in the United States. It is a fraternal society organized into "lodges" that engage in mutual assistance and charitable work. Members pursue metaphysical teachings and initiations that generate solidarity and a sense that members are advancing spiritually, philosophically, and ethically. Most lodges require that Masons believe in a Supreme Being ("The Great Architect of the Universe"). The majority of Masons, at least in the United States, view themselves as Christians even though some members are more devoted to an understanding of universal religion.

The term "Freemasonry" is short for "Free and Accepted Masons." It evolved from ancient stone mason and construction

guilds that were established thousands of years ago for the mutual benefit of its members and that functioned much like guilds and unions do today. A big difference is that they also performed mystical rites. As the centuries passed, many of these guilds began to admit people who were not involved in the building arts, and so the groups transformed into mystical fraternal societies without a trade function—which is what Freemasonry is today.

According to its standard legend, Freemasonry began during the construction of King Solomon's fabulous temple complex in Jerusalem *c.*1000 B.C. Solomon obtained his raw materials and workers from the nearby king of Tyre—a land renowned for its exceptional architects and craftspeople, many of whom belonged to a mystical trade guild called the Dionysian Artificers (*i.e.*, Dionysian Architects). Its members were initiated into secret spiritual teachings called the Dionysian Mysteries named after the Greek god Dionysos.

According to some Masonic historians, the beliefs of the Dionysian Architects were not entirely compatible with Solomon's religion of Judaism, so the good king and a trusted craftsman from Tyre named Hiram Abif ("Huram-Abi" in the Old Testament) organized Solomon's workers into a separate guild that used many of the same titles, practices, and teachings of the Dionysian Mysteries, but in a manner that was compatible with Judaism.

Mystical trade guilds go back even further in time to at least ancient Egypt where we discover important elements that were later used in the Dionysian Mysteries and Freemasonry. Masonry's All-Seeing Eye symbol is similar to Egypt's Eye of Horus, and the symbolic apron is featured in drawings of Egypt's ancient gods. Some of those Egyptian deities were said to be Grand Masters (a title still used in Freemasonry) of the ancient Egyptian guilds: "I am Grand Master of the craftsmen who set up the sacred arch for a support,"[2] proclaims one god in an Egyptian work (*The Book of the Dead*) dating to *c.*3000-1500 B.C. Masonic historians Mackey and McClenahan conclude:

> It was there [in Egypt] that the ceremonies of initiation were first established. It was there that truth was first veiled in allegory, and the dogmas of religion were first imparted under symbolic

> forms. From Egypt...this system of symbols was disseminated through Greece and Rome and other countries of Europe and Asia...[3]

Where does Jesus fit into all of this, if anywhere?

In the New Testament, Jesus and/or his father were carpenters. The Greek word translated as "carpenter" can also mean "mason," "stonemason," "craftsman," or "smith." These are the kinds of people who typically joined the mystical guilds. In light of this, it may be significant that members of the Dionysian Mysteries underwent a ritual that would later be closely imitated in the Passion (suffering and crucifixion) of Christ. The Dionysian ritual involved a god who was murdered and brought back to life. *(Jesus is often portrayed as God incarnate who was murdered and resurrected back to mortal life.)* The Dionysian initiation lasted three days and three nights. *(Jesus was said to have been resurrected from death on the third day.)* Dionysian candidates were purified by water in a type of baptism. *(Jesus was baptized.)* A myrtle branch was used in Dionysian ceremonies. *(Jesus was crowned with thorns on the way to being crucified.)* Dionysian candidates endured a trial of great spiritual significance during which they were taught to believe in a supreme God, and in future rewards and punishments. *(Jesus suffered ordeals of great spiritual meaning, and Christianity preaches a single God who will dispense future spiritual rewards and punishments.)* The Dionysian emerged from the ritual with a sense of having experienced life, death and physical resurrection. *(Jesus reportedly enjoyed physical resurrection after death.)* The similarities are so remarkable that some people believe a mythical Christ was patterned after the Dionysian ritual. Others speculate that Jesus had conspired with his associates to manipulate real-life events into a Dionysian drama as the basis for a new religion. (See chapter 19.) At the very least, it indicates that Jesus was probably exposed to Dionysian beliefs.

As it turns out, the Dionysian ritual was modeled after the Osiris myth taught in Egyptian Mystery Schools and guilds. Osiris was a wise king of Egypt who traveled for three years to teach other nations the arts of civilization. He was slain and physically resurrected, whereupon he became ruler of the dead and passes judgment on the departed: the righteous receive eternal life and wicked

souls are destroyed. Osiris was part of a holy Trinity (Osiris, Isis, and Horus), and his wife Isis was a virgin when she conceived Horus (who is symbolized by the Great Eye). Isis was sometimes portrayed in a veil similar to the one used in the earliest images of Virgin Mary. *The Book of the Dead* says that Osiris will be with the creator god Amun when Amun destroys the world and begins a new creation. These beliefs can be documented to approximately 3,000 B.C., *i.e.*, long before the creation of the Dionysian Mysteries and Christianity. In light of this, it should come as no surprise that Christianity's most important symbol—the cross—was also significant in Egypt where it was called the *ankh* and symbolized "life." The *ankh* looks like the Christian cross except that it has a loop at the top and is often depicted in the hands of a god or goddess.

The Egyptian Mysteries initially worshipped multiple gods, but that was changed by Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, a.k.a. Akhenaten (*r.*1375-1358 B.C.) who demanded worship of a single supreme God symbolized as a disc or sun-disc. Although Akhenaten may have acknowledged the existence of several other gods, he is generally viewed as a monotheist, perhaps the first in the world. Akhenaten declared himself the only son and human intermediary of the supreme God. A famous Egyptian artwork from that era depicts Akhenaten under a solar disc that emits rays with *ankhs* (crosses). Was there a connection between Akhenaten's teachings and Jesus?

By the second century, Jews were accusing Christ of having learned sorcery in Egypt. They said that he had been born into poverty and went to Egypt to work as a servant. There he acquired magical powers taught by Egyptian mystics. Elated with his new abilities, Jesus returned home and held himself out to be a god.

In 1929 and 1937, H. Spencer Lewis, founder of the San Jose-based Rosicrucian order (AMORC), published three books containing details of Jesus' alleged Egyptian training: *Rosicrucian Questions and Answers With Complete History, Mystical Life of Jesus,* and *The Secret Doctrine of Jesus.* These tomes are said to reveal the true history of Akhenaten's sect and Christ's participation. Lewis claims to have obtained his more noteworthy data from ancient records that were secretly preserved by fellow Rosicrucians. The originals of those documents have never been made available for public study,

and so his entire story must be classified as a legend (*i.e.*, the AMORC Legend).

Histories typically say that Akhenaten's monotheism vanished within two decades of his death because he mandated away the old polytheism without offering a satisfactory replacement. His monotheism was never intended to be popular, and inner participation was limited to his own family. Lewis, on the other hand, claims that Akhenaten grafted his monotheism onto an already-existing mystical brotherhood that had been governed for generations by his ancestors. Lewis calls it the "Great White Brotherhood" ("GWB"). Admission into the GWB was by invitation only and restricted to the innermost elite of Egyptian society, along with some outsiders. Akhenaten assumed command of the GWB as a young king from his father. He built a cross-shaped temple for the GWB in the territory of el-Amarna where he also established the new political capital of Akhetaten after his coronation. Housing was constructed for 290 "brothers" of the order who lived monastically and wore cord-at-the-loin vestments with hoods as Christian monks would later do. The high priest shaved his head in a round spot at the top and wore a broad-sleeved gown. Akhenaten invented mystical symbols to prevent the uninitiated from penetrating the GWB's hidden spiritual teachings. After he died, monotheism vanished in Egypt except, according to Lewis, in the GWB. By then, the GWB had only one temple, and that was in el-Amarna.

After several generations, the GWB decided to establish branches in other countries by initiating outsiders and sending them back home. The AMORC Legend contains a roster of distinguished initiates including King Solomon *c.* 1000 B.C.*, Hebrew prophet Elijah in the 800's B.C., Greek philosopher Pythagoras *c.*531 B.C., John the Baptist, and Jesus. The GWB's foreign branches also took different names. In Palestine they were called the Essenes, and in Greece they were the *Therapeutes.* The most important GWB/Essene school was at Mount Carmel where initiate Elijah had established a retreat. A grotto at the foot of Mount Carmel is still revered today as the Cave of Elijah.

* According to Lewis, Solomon's guild and temple were not officially connected to the GWB despite Solomon's use of GWB methods and teachings.

According to Lewis, Jesus' parents were Galilean Essenes, and father Joseph was a priest in the Order. The Essenes were all Gentiles but they outwardly followed the compulsory Jewish laws. Jesus was miraculously conceived, and at the age of six his parents surrendered him to the Essene brothers at Carmel to be raised and groomed for his role as the Messiah. The Carmel Essenes were in close communication with the GWB in Egypt which had by that time moved its temple from el-Amarna to Heliopolis.

Jesus completed his education at Carmel as a young man and then traveled extensively, including to India and Tibet. After years of study abroad, Christ headed for Egypt via Greece. In Egypt, he underwent a lengthy GWB initiation to prepare him for his Christhood. The GWB in Egypt and the Essenes at Carmel thereafter focused their attention on making their protege a success.

Lewis claims that many people surrounding Christ were affiliated with the GWB and its Essene branch. John the Baptist was an Essene who had also studied with the GWB in Egypt, and he was appointed the role of proclaiming Jesus to the world. Christ's Twelve Apostles were all chosen from among Galilean Essenes. Eventually Christianity became independent of the GWB. Centuries after the crucifixion, the GWB abandoned Egypt and Carmel for a more isolated location in Tibet.

That, briefly, is the AMORC Legend. Can it be verified?

Somewhat. We already noted from other sources that Jesus had a likely connection to the Nasoreans who were headquartered at Carmel and were probably linked to the Essenes. In *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius saw a connection between Egypt, the Essene-like *Therapeutae*, and Christianity. He cites Philo who indicated that the *Therapeutae* were concentrated mostly in Egypt, especially at Alexandria. Eusebius remarks how the Christians of his day, and only the Christians, closely followed the basic ceremonies, teachings, and life style of the *Therapeutae*. Christian rites involving the Passion of Jesus were similar to those of the *Therapeutae*. Eusebius assumes that these similarities happened because the *Therapeutae* were influenced by Christians like John Mark who had gone to Egypt to spread the gospel. This assumption is probably incorrect because Philo had written about the *Therapeutae* within a decade or so of the crucifixion (*i.e.*, before John Mark wrote his gospel), and this would make it more likely that Christians borrowed from the *Therapeutae*.

As for Christ being at Mount Carmel, there is a popular legend about it. In the 18th century, a Christian named John Baptist of St. Alexis was sent there to rebuild a monastery. He published a book at Turin in 1780 entitled *Historical Compendium of Carmel Ancient and Modern* that contained Jesus legends from the region. A good summary is found in the more recent *Carmel In the Holy Land:*

> He [*i.e.*, John Baptist of St. Alexis] reports that the Carmelite hermits, whom he calls Essenes, living in the Cave of Elijah, had the good fortune of speaking to Our Lady [*i.e.*, Virgin Mary] as a child when she was brought on a visit to Carmel by her parents Anne and Joachim. She in her turn often went there with Joseph and the boy Jesus. Later, Jesus preached on Carmel. On their way back from Egypt, the Holy Family would have spent the night in the little cave carved in the walls of the larger cave, then known as the Cell of Elijah.[4]

Essenes? Nasoreans? Dionysians? Pythagoreans? *Therapeutae*? Freemasons? Mystical guilds? Mystery Schools? GWB? It is enough to make a person dizzy. Suffice it to say that this type of mystery religion was very common in Jesus' day, was practiced under many names and in many forms, and the groups were often interconnected. Much of their ritual and theology started in Egypt, and some of them still had connections to Egypt when Jesus was alive. A common trait is that their spiritual teachings were secret and only revealed to chosen initiates. The population at large was fed allegory and symbolism to *prevent* access to the spiritual truths these groups believed they possessed. The New Testament suggests that Jesus engaged in the same practice:

> His disciples asked him what this parable meant, and he replied, "It has been granted to you to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but the others have only parables, so that they may look but see nothing, hear but understand nothing.
>
> *Luke* 8:9-10 (REB)

This quote is remarkable because Jesus seems to admit that he was not giving the public his most important spiritual teachings. This is confirmed by *Mark* 4:33: "He did not say anything to them [*i.e.*, to general audiences] without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything." (NIV). The gospels contain a handful of parables along with their meanings, but much is clearly missing. In his farewell at the Last Supper, Christ seems to admit that he never spoke in a straightforward manner about God, even to his own Apostles: "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father." (*John* 16:25, NIV). One implication of these statements is that the New Testament gospels were never meant to be anything more than promotion pieces ("hooks") to bring people in, and once in, then people would receive the secret wisdom. That wisdom vanished long ago, leaving only the "hooks" as the basis of belief.

Another implication is that orthodox Christianity is "Egyptian religion for the masses." It took resurrection religion out of the secret temples and made it available to everyone, but in a way that continued to deny public access to deeper spiritual truths.

All of this may provide humanity with a vital lesson. If Jesus intended to save the human race spiritually, he would have been foolish to use the teaching methods of the Egyptian sects. All of the hidden lessons that he may have taught to his closest disciples should have been written down immediately and broadcast widely to everyone, because that is how knowledge is preserved and made useful. History has demonstrated that when knowledge is restricted to an "elite," it nearly always becomes degraded or lost. The consequences have been spiritually catastrophic to humanity. For this reason, any organization that claims to possess secret spiritual or historical knowledge should publish and make it publicly available even if doing so means losing an important recruitment tool, namely the mystique of "hidden knowledge."

How do we reconcile resurrection religion which says that recovered souls will stay eternally connected to bodies (a belief that caused Egyptians to engage in mummification) with the Essene teaching that freed souls will choose to escape bodies? There really is no good way to do so, and this can make a religion seem schizophrenic when it tries to teach both. Pauline (orthodox) Christianity comes across as preaching two conflicting views of salvation at the same time. This problem was already evident long ago in that stranger-than-fiction civilization we know as ancient Egypt.

The Big One

Brenda and Orion pondered the man before them.

"Joe," Brenda said carefully. "I have a public relations technique that I call the Five Fabulous Facts. You take five facts that you want the world to know about your client, and you repeat them over and over again. You pick facts that make people instantly remember and like you. Your facts can't be hard to understand...and they can't be weird. So far, I only have one Fabulous Fact: that you are Jesus Christ. I need four more."

Orion stood in deep thought.

"Let's look at the other big angle here," he mused. "Joe will be at the center of some major action. Isn't there supposed to be some kind of Rapture when Christians will be lifted into Heaven no matter where they happen to be? We're talking car crashes, train wrecks, airplanes going down when pilots suddenly disappear; you name it! The visuals will be incredible with Joe at the hub."

Brenda grew excited. "And he's got the Final Battle of Armageddon. Ultimate Good versus Ultimate Evil duking it out on a plain in the Middle East. It's the ultimate Super Bowl."

"It's perfect for Pay-Per-View," Orion enthused. "Joe, this could mean thirty or forty million dollars to you."

Joe was silent.

"I think we agree," Brenda continued, "this could be bigger than the next Oscars, right?"

"Possibly, yes," Orion considered. "But let's face it, the Academy Awards are going to be awesome because of Stephanie's botched face job and her in the running for Best Actress."

"Granted," Brenda conceded, "but imagine the ratings for exclusive network coverage of the Final Battle. Go with me on this: if we do a network exclusive instead of Pay-Per-View, we would be looking at millions of dollars for every half-minute advertising spot. If the Final Battle goes more than a day, it would be the most lucrative exclusive that any network got on anything. Follow that with prime time coverage of the Final Judgment, and we've got the ratings blockbuster of the millennium! Imagine seeing every celebrity and politician in front of Joe or God being judged! Talk about dirty laundry and a ratings sweep, this is it!"

"I think you've nailed it, Brenda," Orion agreed and turned to Joe. "Catch my drift here, friend. Your take—no lie—could be over two hundred million dollars! How long will the Final Battle last? The networks will want a time estimate before they bid on the rights. If it's too long, they may just want to cover the highlights."

"Same with the Final Judgment," Brenda piped in. "They will only want to cover it when the celebs are called. Maybe we can format it as a reality show."

Joe looked into the expectant faces of his hosts. He had to choose his next words carefully.

"Let me play a game with you," he decided. "What if the Final Battle already came and went, but most people were too busy to notice?"

"I don't follow," Orion objected.

"People have been saying for centuries that the Final Battle would begin soon," Joe continued. "What if some of them were right and it already happened?"

"Well, burst my bubble," Brenda frowned, "but I don't remember being in front of God for my Day of Judgment. How about you, Ryan?"

"Well, now," the agent replied thoughtfully, "let's see where he's going with this. Joe, what's the point you're trying to make?"

The guest smiled playfully. "You're looking for something magical to happen in the future, but how do you know that the salvation process has not already begun? What if the magic is already here, but most people are not seeing it?"

Chapter 10

Jesus: The Knowledge Giver

My friends, think what sort of people you are, whom God has called. Few of you are wise by any human standard...
1:1 Corinthians 26 (REB)

Avoid profane babbling and the absurdities of so-called knowledge. By professing it, some people have deviated from the faith.
1 Timothy 6:20-21 (NAB)

We live in an age when knowledge is prized and intelligence is an asset. These are employed with great success to tackle problems and improve human welfare. We praise doctors and scientists who make breakthroughs against disease. We pay people to invent ways to make cars safer, computers faster, and the environment cleaner. History and daily life teach us that most problems are solved by learning and utilizing what we learn.

As discussed in chapter 1, many religions, including Christianity, say that we face a whopper of a problem: we are gravely imperiled as souls. If this is true, then we need to solve it, and probably soon. The logical approach is to learn as much as we can about the situation and apply what we learn. But that is not what most theologies tell us to do.

Many religions share a strange trait. Once they have established a set of teachings and path to salvation, people are expected to follow without deviation or further exploration. If people seek more, it is only because they misunderstand the teachings, are misled, or bear some ill will. Deviation never happens because there might be other solutions or more to learn. This anti-intellectual attitude has pervaded religion from olden times to the present. The quotes at the beginning of this chapter seem to tell Christians, "Forget knowledge, you're pretty stupid anyway, so take it on faith." Why do we accept such attitudes in religion when they are condemned in almost every other activity?

In religion, the stakes are extremely high: eternal existence. This is heady stuff. If someone has solved the problem of spiritual

decline, then it seems imperative to follow that person's path very precisely. People who damage that path or cause others to stray are putting others at risk of a terrible fate. Given these circumstances, it understandable that followers can become zealous. What those followers fail to understand is that no known religion in history has proven that its members actually achieve the ultimate salvation they envision. Almost any widely-followed religion can demonstrate that it helps many people to live better lives and to advance spiritually, but how many Essenes during Jesus' day could actually go in and out of their bodies? How many Buddhists are achieving full Nirvana as defined by Buddha? (Even the Dalai Lama says that it can take a very long time, more than a single lifetime.) Paul's writings make it clear that Jesus' Second Coming (the event that is supposed to finalize the salvation process on Earth) would occur during Paul's generation, but that never happened. If Paul was so wrong on that point, is it smart to risk everyone's spiritual future on his other teachings?

We can take this a step further with an analogy. If you are a doctor who promises cancer victims total remission, but nearly all of your patients achieve only partial remissions, you have done a wonderful thing, but you have not solved the entire problem. Is it fair for you to demand that cancer victims follow just your methods and not seek more answers? Since it is clear that you have discovered part of the solution, but not all of it, is it fair to stop people from trying to carefully improve on your discoveries?

Progress happens when people advance the knowledge, discoveries, and inventions of others. Creators and discoverers should certainly be rewarded for their efforts, and where a technique works, it should be followed until a genuinely better method is found. But if further innovation is aggressively repressed, progress comes to a standstill. This is an important reason why religion seems to remain primitive, and why most spiritual innovation happens in sudden spurts. Religion is virtually the only endeavor that passionately discourages innovation and tries to freeze progress, all with the sincerest of convictions and best of intentions.

This tension is what nearly destroyed the early Christian Church.

Christianity after the crucifixion was not a unified theology. It was a hodge-podge of belief systems that competed for supremacy. For example, Paul had sharp words with Peter and James over the question of circumcision: Peter and James said that it should be required of all Christians, but Paul objected, and so they preached to different audiences with a Jewish Christianity and a Gentile Christianity. Paul's Gentile version eventually won, perhaps for the simple reason that most non-Jewish men did not care for the idea of circumcision.

The bigger dispute, however, erupted between Paul and the "Gnostics." *Gnosis* is the Greek word for "investigation" or "knowledge." Gnosticism is an effort to attain spiritual salvation through investigation and understanding. As the Thorndike-Barnhart dictionary tells us, "Gnostics claimed that spiritual knowledge, rather than faith, was essential to salvation."[1]

Most of what we know today about Gnostic Christianity comes from the writings of early Christian heresy-hunters who quoted or discussed Gnostic teachings in an effort to debunk them, along with a remarkable archaeological discovery made in 1945: the Nag Hammadi library. The Nag Hammadi documents are a collection of letters, books, and some never-before-seen gospels that were preserved by a community of Gnostic Christians who lived in upper Egypt around the fourth century A.D.

The primary belief of Gnosticism is that people are souls who existed before the birth of their physical bodies and will continue to exist after the bodies die. *The NIV Study Bible* adds:

> Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter is entirely evil...Man's body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good...Salvation is the escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge...[2]

Although Gnostic Christians believed in God, they did not believe that God had created this universe. This universe—which is evil—was made by God's subordinate and enemy known as the Demiurge or by a group of angels ("archons") that were greatly inferior to God. "Demiurge" comes from the Greek *démios* ("public") and *érgon* ("work"), which is a reference to the public universe we are sharing as souls. Human bodies, which are made of the substance of this universe, are also not the creations of the true God. Gnostics considered human bodies to be prisons just as the Essenes did. They taught that Jehovah (Yahweh) of the Old Testament was an inferior entity and not the true God.

Some people find the idea of separation from the body to be frightening. A reassuring explanation of the Gnostic view can be made with an analogy. A soul in a body is like a driver in a car. Imagine if we, as humans, could never leave our cars until they permanently broke down. We would probably adapt to such an existence and learn to interact with each other through our vehicles, but we would start thinking of ourselves as automobiles and not as human beings. The freedom to enter and exit our cars expands our range of experiences and ways to interact with each other.

Could this be a dangerous philosophy? It seems to encourage death because that is when the soul typically separates from the body.

Many Gnostics believed that if a soul has not achieved spiritual liberation while still involved with the body, it will gain nothing after the body's death:

> Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. If they do not receive the resurrection [of the soul] while they live, when they die they will receive nothing.[3]

This belief reflects those eastern religions which teach that death leads to a rebirth process (reincarnation) that is damaging to souls. A truly liberated soul will no longer reincarnate. Inflicting death on one's own body or the body of another is therefore a serious spiritual crime.

Gnosticism had many variations: the "Valentinians," "Marcosians," "Nicolaitans," etc., but it is difficult to pinpoint when the seeds of Gnosticism were first planted. Wisdom-based theology has always existed, and it especially flourished during the half millennium before Christ. That was a period when India gave birth to several salvation systems including Buddhism, and Greece was

home to some of history's most celebrated philosophers who contributed their Gnostic-like ideas to the spiritual debate.

In the decades immediately after the crucifixion, many Christians preached a Gnostic theology that they attributed to Jesus. Paul and other founding Christians aimed their harshest rhetoric at these "false teachers." (See, *e.g., 1 Timothy* 6:20-21, *Jude* 1:4, 1:7, *2 Peter* 2:1, 2:10-22). Some (but not all) Gnostic Christians disbelieved in Christ's physical resurrection and the Second Coming. (*2 John* 1:7) Paul warned his readers to avoid these "progressive" teachers who would surely be punished by God. (*2 John* 1:9-11).

The Gnostics remained influential long after Paul died. *The NIV Study Bible* states bluntly, "One of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries of the church was Gnosticism."[4] The *Catholic Study Bible* agrees when it describes Gnosticism as "the great rival and enemy of the church for two centuries and more...."[5] Gnosticism is still a sensitive issue in our own time: in 1994, Pope John Paul II warned of Gnosticism's reemergence "under the guise of the so-called New Age"[6] and added that it "has always existed side by side with Christianity...in distinct, if not declared, conflict with all that is essentially Christian."[7]

Gnostic Christians saw their role differently. They were the true purveyors of Christ's teachings. Ironically, many Gnostics cited Paul's writings as authority for their own views. His statements about going out of body for salvation (see chapter 8) strongly reflect Gnostic theology.

We know, of course, which side won. When orthodox Christianity was made the official religion of the East Roman Empire in the 4th century A.D., Gnostic Christians were among the many victims who suffered terrible deaths at the hands of government executioners. Gnostic writings were so efficiently destroyed by orthodox Christians (and later by Islamic heresy hunters) that hardly any survived. The Nag Hammadi Library was a rare exception.

Christian Gnostics came from many backgrounds and found a common teacher in Jesus. Were they correct to say that Jesus shared their beliefs?

By and large, the Synoptic Gospels do not support such a theory. Christ was said to teach the standard Jewish idea that the universe was created by the benevolent Father God:

> But in the beginning, at the creation, "God made them [*i.e.,* Adam and Eve] male and female."
>
> *Mark* 10:6 (REB)

> Consider how the lilies grow in the fields; they do not work, they do not spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendour was not attired like one of them. If that is how God clothes the grass in the fields...will he not all the more clothe you?
>
> *Matthew* 6:28-30 (REB)

The *Gospel According to John,* on the other hand, paints a different picture. In his book, *A History of Gnosticism,* Professor Giovanni Filoramo points out that *John* seems to have been influenced by a form of Gnosticism that existed before the gospels were written. The opening verses of *John* have a strong Gnostic flavor:

> In the beginning was the Word,
> and the Word was with God,
> and the Word was God.
> He [*i.e.,* Jesus as the incarnation of the Word] was in the beginning with God.
> All things came to be through him,
> and without him nothing came to be.
> ....
> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
>
> *John* 1:1-3, 9 (NAB)

This verse is commonly interpreted to mean that God possesses a wisdom (the "Word") that was the basis of all creation. Jesus was the incarnation of that wisdom, and he offered it to humanity.

Other sayings of Jesus in *John* are also Gnostic-like, as well as Essene-like:

1. "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." (*John* 3:6, NIV). This is an expression of "dualism": a philosophy that physical matter and spirit are completely separate creations.

2. "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing." (*John* 6:63, NIV).

3. "If you stand by my teaching, you are truly my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (*John* 8:31-32, REB). This famous passage teaches that truth (*i.e.,* ultimate knowledge) is the means to salvation. This was a principal message of the Gnostics.

4. "In very truth I tell you, if anyone obeys my teaching he will never see death." (*John* 8:51, REB). This passage can be interpreted as Jesus offering a Gnostic promise: souls will never again suffer the illusion of death if certain knowledge is attained. Most Christians view these words as a promise of physical immortality, but it is unlikely that Jesus would have made such a promise in light of his statement that "the flesh counts for nothing." In fact, many Gnostics would consider the "promise" of physical immortality as a threat of eternal imprisonment in a body.

5. "In very truth I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am." (*John* 8:58, REB). This refers to the Jewish patriarch who lived more than 1,500 years before Christ. In this quote, Jesus suggests that he enjoys a timeless spiritual existence by saying "I am" instead of "I was." Many Gnostics believed that all people enjoy such an existence as souls but most have lost direct awareness of it.

Not all passages in *John* support the "Jesus Was a Gnostic" hypothesis. In 3:16, Christ claims that he is "God's one and only Son" (NIV), and this is contrary to a popular Gnostic belief that all souls are the offspring of a parent God. *John* 5:39-40 has Jesus proclaiming himself the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures, but to Gnostics, this would mean that he was a messenger of the evil Demiurge. In 8:34-35, Jesus says that humanity's spiritual problems are caused by sin, in contrast to Gnostics who said they are caused by inadequate knowledge.

The Gnostics had much to say about Christ. About half of all surviving apocryphal gospels were apparently written by Gnostic Christians. One is widely regarded as a complete hoax, namely the *Gospel of Nicodemus,* also known as the *Acts of Pontius Pilate.* Another entitled *The Sophia* [i.e., *"God's Creative Wisdom"] of Christ* blatantly plagiarizes a story known as *Eugnostos the Blessed* and places the words of Eugnostos into Jesus' mouth. The remaining thirteen or so Gnostic gospels appear to be sincere. Only two of them, namely the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Mary,* might have been written before the New Testament gospels, and so they offer the best clues about any Gnostic beliefs that Christ may have embraced.

Thomas is probably the oldest Gnostic gospel. It was written as early as A.D. 50 (but possibly as late as *c.*A.D. 140, which would put it after the orthodox gospels). *Thomas* is a "sayings Gospel" which means that it contains only teachings but not stories. The opening words are very promising: "These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down."[8] Does *Thomas* reveal the secret teachings that Christ reserved for his Apostles—the omitted knowledge that is necessary for salvation? Unfortunately, no. *Thomas* imparts moral lessons and parables that are also found in the Synoptic Gospels, along with other teachings. This causes some scholars to believe that *Thomas* was either based on now-lost writings about Jesus such as the hypothetical "Q" Gospel, or *Thomas* and the Synoptic Gospels borrowed from one another. Other analysts believe that *Thomas* came before the Synoptics, and it may therefore be the most authentic record of Christ's teachings that we have:

> If one considers the form and wording of the individual sayings [in *Thomas*] in comparison with the form in which they are preserved in the New Testament, *The Gospel of Thomas* almost always appears to have preserved a more original form of the traditional saying (in a few instances, where this is not the case, the Coptic translation [of *Thomas*] seems to have been influenced by the translator's knowledge of the New Testament gospels), or presents versions which are independently based on more original forms.[9]

Thomas quotes Jesus in decidedly Gnostic ways that are sometimes in opposition to orthodox Christianity. For example, there is a conspicuous absence of apocalyptic (*i.e.,* Day of Judgment) teachings. Instead, when Jesus is asked, "When will the kingdom [of God] come?"[10], he answers:

> It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here it is,' or 'Look, there it is.' Rather, the father's kingdom is spread out upon the earth, and people do not see it.[11]

He seems to be saying that God's kingdom is already here, and there is no need to await a future Judgment Day or "Final Battle." People just need to discover what is in front of them:

> Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed.[12]

Luke 17: 20-21 seems to affirm this idea when it quotes Jesus saying, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or "There it is!' For, in fact, the kindgom of God is among [or "within"] you." (NRSV).

In *Thomas,* Jesus teaches that the body has a parasitic relationship to the soul, and many souls are addicted to bodies:

> Damn the flesh that depends on the soul. Damn the soul that depends on the flesh."[13]

> If the flesh came into being because of spirit, it is a marvel, but if spirit came into being because of the body, it is a marvel of marvels. Yet I marvel at how this great wealth [*i.e.,* spirit] came to dwell in this poverty [*i.e.,* the body].[14]

Thomas' Jesus did not perceive himself as the only child of God. Everyone has that status: "When you know yourselves...you will know that you are children of the living father."[15]

Our true spiritual goal should be limitless existence outside of time, *i.e.,* reclaiming spiritual immortality. When Jesus is asked, "Tell us how our end will be,"[16] he replies:

> ...where the beginning is, the end will be. Fortunate is the one who stands at the beginning: That one will know the end and not taste death."[17]

Mary is the other Gnostic gospel that may have been penned before the orthodox gospels. It came into existence as early as A.D. 50, although some historians date it to the second century A.D. partly because it tells of Christ being physically resurrected.

Mary is also a sayings gospel and is named after Mary Magdalene–a follower of Christ. Magdalene is portrayed as a leader who teaches the other Apostles some lessons that Christ had not revealed to them. Her teachings have familiar Gnostic themes and have been interpreted in different ways. In *The Complete Gospels,* Associate Professor Karen L. King offers her perspective: the universe will eventually be dissolved, and when that happens our spiritual natures will be fully restored to us because we will be freed from bodies and the material world. People suffer sickness and death due to loving the material world and because their bodies deceive them. The body is a false image of self that leads people away from their true spiritual natures.

Mary contains no apocalypse in the traditional sense. It sees a future when the universe will simply dissolve.

There are strong parallels between Essene beliefs as described by Josephus and the Gnostic gospels. If Jesus was an Essene, then Gnostic Christians had a strong claim to being the true bearers of his message. On the other hand, they would also share the blame for Jesus' message becoming lost. Many early Gnostics leaders were elitists who kept their teachings secret. The majority of Gnostic Gospels that we know of today are mishmashes of orthodox Christianity and Gnosticism; heresy hunters like Irenaeus and Epiphanius were right to find fault in how some Gnostics tried to interpret New Testament teachings. The refreshing simplicity of *Thomas* was later abandoned in many Gnostic works for dense metaphysical lectures that translated poorly. Gnostics became steeped in rituals, prayers and metaphors instead of taking a straightforward academic approach to the subject. Although most Gnostics practiced asceticism, a small minority rejected common morality, especially in regard to sex and procreation, and this gave Paul and heresy hunters effective ammunition to aim at their Gnostic rivals. (See, *e.g., Jude* 8, *2 Peter* 10-22, *Philippians* 3:2-19, and the writings of Epiphanius). The East Roman emperors later accused Gnostics of shocking immorality as a pretext to murder them and destroy their writings.

If Jesus was a Gnostic, then we are faced with the reality that most of his teachings are lost for good. *Thomas* does not deliver on its promise of providing the missing data. The only way to

recover any secret spiritual truths that Jesus may have known is to regain such knowledge anew, except this time through methodical research and study like any other science. This approach has been tried at various times and has yielded some promising literature, but it continues to be marred by agendas that hurt its cause. Time will tell if a sane approach to religion ever becomes universal.

The Jesus Was a Gnostic Theory is one of the best-supported alternative theories about Christ. It raises a very important question: Was Jesus preaching a religion based on faith or on knowledge? Might it be wrong to think that Jesus, or any religious teacher, would say, "believe in me and you will be automatically saved"? Believing in a teacher means that you have confidence that she or he will be able to teach something useful, but you still need to take the time to absorb the teacher's information.

All of this has led to a conspiracy theory about Paul. When he was unable to destroy Christianity as an outsider, he pretended to convert so that he could dismantle it from within. He did this by trying to discredit the teachers who still knew and taught Christ's secret wisdom. By gutting the church of those teachings and replacing them with a resurrection religion, Paul left only a shell. In his defense, it must be acknowledged that it is difficult to know his motives since scholars disagree about the authenticity of many writings attributed to him. We cannot be certain what Jesus' hidden teachings actually were beyond the possible meanings of a few parables, and therefore it is difficult to determine if any Gnostics actually taught the lessons that Jesus had reserved for his Apostles. Perhaps this means that if Jesus had a true roadmap to salvation, we will never know.

Dinner Plans

There are days when Los Angeles seems to be about one thing only: traffic. Many Angelenos carefully plan their days to avoid the worst crushes. Orion was one of them. His office at home was equipped with every miracle of modern communication: telephone, fax, e-mail, and computer link-up. Each document in every GTA file was scanned into the company's computer to allow day-and-night access from anywhere in the world.

Orion's routine was to leave the office at 2:30 p.m., use his cell phone to talk business on the road, and then log on to GTA's database from his in-home office which opened to a beautiful English-style garden that he and Serena had cultivated. Every major producer in Hollywood would eventually come to sit in that office at least once.

Orion glanced at his watch. 4:28 p.m. The meeting with Brenda was over, but it was too late to drive home. It would be better to stay at the office and go straight to dinner.

"Joe," he announced, "I would be pleased to have you join me and my wife Serena for dinner at Spago. It's a post-production affair, and I'd like to introduce you to a few people."

"I would be happy to accept, but only if you have not become weary of my company."

"Hardly," Orion smiled. "And besides, I have a hunch that Serena would like to spend some time talking to you."

"I would be delighted to meet her."

Orion walked to the phone and dialed home.

"Hi, sweetheart," he said. "Listen, it's almost five and we have that dinner tonight at six...Uh-huh...He's sitting right here... Sure, he's coming with us...."

Orion turned to Joe. "My wife is looking forward to meeting you."

"The pleasure will be mine," Joe replied.

"Hon, did you hear that?...OK, I'll see you soon. We'll all go to Spago together...Love you."

Orion hung up and turned to Brenda who had entered the office with her initial thoughts for a publicity plan.

"How about you, Brenda?" Orion inquired. "Will you be coming?"

"Not tonight," she demurred. "Carl and I were invited to a soiree with Rompaul D'Levit. Sorry, Joe, but I can't miss it even for your Second Coming."

"He's a fancy poet from the south of France," Orion explained to his guest. "Brenda is the best publicist in the business, and she mud-wrestles with the crudest tabloids on Earth, but privately she's pure literati and opera."

Joe wrinkled his brow in thought. "Is not D'Levit the one who wrote, 'For an ounce of pure soul I will give you a ton of pure gold, and one day you will know that I cheated you.'?"

"Why, yes!" Brenda exclaimed. "How exciting that you know him!"

"Your taste in writers is admirable," Joe smiled.

Orion rolled his eyes as he noticed Brenda becoming giddy. His tough-as-nails publicist had started melting in the glow of Joe's attention. He was certainly a charmer, and yet Orion could sense nothing false in it.

"Joe," Orion said, "you're a very upbeat person, and that's going to be a big plus in your PR campaign. You've been impeccably polite, but I seem to remember that you could also be angry and cynical. We need to know the 'total you.'"

"I have my angry moments, but am I a cynic? I suppose I have been called that as well."

Chapter 11

Jesus: The Cynic

Have you ever listened to a political speech only to find it scripted and formulaic? Do you ever sarcastically think "yeah, right" when someone protests his or her innocence?

Nearly everyone becomes cynical now and again, but two thousand years ago it was a way of life for a group of people who were called the *kuon* (Greek for "dogs") or *kynicos* ("doglike"). These philosophers have been called shabby and shameless, and they were well-known for their "in-your-face" attitude when they challenged people's behaviors and assumptions.

Cynic philosophy was developed more than three hundred years before Christ by a Greek philosopher named Antisthenes, who was a follower of Socrates. Antisthenes taught in a school called Cynosarges which lay east of Athens. (Some historians believe that the name of this school, and not "doglike," gave us the word "cynic"). Antisthenes said that happiness is attained solely by the pursuit of virtue and not by the pursuit of happiness for its own sake. Virtue can only be demonstrated by deeds and not words. Pleasures of the body are to be avoided, and poverty is good for maintaining internal self-sufficiency. Cynics were "mockers of mankind" who felt duty-bound to expose the conceited delusions behind many human activities.

One of Antisthenes' true believers was Diogenes who created the true character of the Cynic sect. Diogenes lived as a pauper, scorned all possessions, avoided human relationships, and refused civic responsibility. The most famous story about him is that he carried a lighted lamp in broad daylight seeking to find a truly virtuous man, but his search was futile.

By Jesus' lifetime, the Cynics were a fact of life in the Roman Empire, and they remained influential for the next two centuries, even instigating some riots.

Some people think that Jesus was a Cynic, and Christians wrote about this possibility as early as the second century. This connection is largely overlooked today, but we have been reminded

of it by various scholars, including F. Gerald Downing who concludes:

> It seems to me that it will appear that Christians who shared publicly the teaching and stories that go to build up our first three gospels must have been entirely happy to sound as well as look like Cynics, content to find themselves saying a great many things of the kind that the Cynics were saying. They focused on the same topics, very often pressing the same conclusions, and that frequently in very similar language.[1]

Downing points to Jesus' life style as the first clue that he was a Cynic. Christ was outspoken, lived in voluntary poverty, preached widely to ordinary people, and loudly denounced the hypocrisy of those in power. These were classic Cynic qualities.

Downing also reveals close parallels between Cynic teachings and Jesus' sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. Here are just a few of the many he cites:

Loving Your Enemies

Jesus: "Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who treat you spitefully. If anyone hits you on the cheek, offer the other also...." (*Luke* 6:27-29, REB).

Cynics: "A rather nice part of being a Cynic comes when you have to be beaten like an ass, and throughout the beating you have to love those who are beating you as though you were father or brother to them."[2]

Giving Generously

Jesus: "Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back." (*Luke* 6:29-30, NAB)

Cynics: "How much more splendid than consuming lots of goods, to do good to lots of people! How much better to spend money on other people than on bits of wood and stone for yourself."[3]

The Golden Rule

Jesus: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (*Luke* 6:31, NRSV).

Cynics: "Take care not to harm others, so others won't harm you."[4]

Hypocrisy

Jesus: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, with never a thought for the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye.' when all the time there is a plank in your own? You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's." (*Matthew* 7:3-5, REB).

Cynics: "And you, are you at liberty to examine others' wickedness, and pass judgment on anyone..? You take note of others' pimples when you yourselves are a mass of sores...It's like someone covered in foul scabs laughing at the odd mole or wart on someone of real beauty."[5]

Childish Behavior

Jesus: "To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, 'We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.'" (*Matthew* 11:16-17, NAB).

Cynics: "Don't let the children show you up as cowards. When the game doesn't please them they say, I'm not playing. That's what you should do, if things have got to that stage for you. Just say I'm not playing, and leave."[6]

Internal Division

Jesus: "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand." (*Matthew* 12:25).

Cynics: "Take a ship, for instance. Everyone sailing in it knows there's only one way to ensure their safety: the sailors must work together and obey the man at the helm. They know that, if there's dissension and indiscipline on board, even favourable winds are lost before they veer round against the ship, so it misses reaching port, even from quite close in. Yet still the sailors sometimes stupidly fall out with each other and bring shipwreck on themselves, despite being fully aware of what makes such disasters happen."[7]

Being Provided For

Jesus: "Consider how the lilies grow in the fields; they do not work, they do not spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendour was not attired like one of them...So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself." (*Matthew* 6:26-29, 34, REB)

Cynics: "'Good God, that's all very well, but I'm a poor man without property. Suppose I have lots of children, where am I going to get food for them all?' Well, where do the little birds go to get food from to feed their young, though they're much worse off than you are—the swallows and nightingales and larks and blackbirds...?...Do they store food away in self-keeping?"[8]

Spiritual Seeds

Jesus: "What is the kingdom of God like? To what can I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that a person took and planted in the garden. When it was fully grown, it became a large bush and 'the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches.'" (*Luke* 13:18-19, NAB).

Cynics: "These words should be scattered like seeds. However small a seed is, once it's sown in suitable ground, its potential unfolds, and from something tiny it spreads out to its maximum size...I'd say brief precepts and seeds have much in common. Great results come from small beginnings."[9]

Mental Adultery

Jesus: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (*Matthew* 5:27-28, NRSV)

Cynics: "Today when I saw a pretty boy or a pretty girl, I didn't say to myself, 'I should be in bed with that one...' Nor do I go on to the next excitement, picturing the girl there with me, undressing and lying down beside me. So, I can pat myself on the head and say, 'Well done...'"[10]

Taking Oaths

Jesus: "But what I tell you is this: You are not to swear at all—not by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king... Plain 'Yes' or 'No' is all you need to say..." (*Matthew* 5:34-7, REB).

Cynics: "If at all possible refuse to take any oath at all. If you have to, make it as minimal as circumstances allow."[11]

Healing the Sick

Jesus: "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." (*Mark* 2:17, NAB).

Cynics: "On one occasion Antisthenes was criticized for mixing with ne'er-do-wells. 'Physicians,' he said, 'can attend the sick without catching the fever.'"[12]

Christians today still voice sentiments that were popular with the Cynics. When a Christian says, "I don't hate the sinner, only the sin," he or she is echoing the pre-Christian Cynic who professed, "I don't hate my fellow humans, only their wickedness."[13] When a Christian yields to "God's will," it is something that Cynics did long before: "I shall commit myself to him [*i.e.,* to God] as servant and follower, choosing what he chooses, desiring what he desires, willing what he wills."[14]

Downing offers hundreds of additional comparisons, and they provide a persuasive case that Jesus and/or the earliest Christians had been members of the Cynic sect, or they embraced Cynic ideology to a great extent.

The Cynics' theological outlook was essentially Gnostic. They encouraged people to seek spiritual separation from the body during life, otherwise salvation would be difficult:

> Concern yourself with how you're to leave this life. You'll do that if you pay attention to dying itself; and that means separating body and soul while you are still alive.[15]

> If we don't prepare carefully for death, a very unpleasant end awaits us...it's only with great difficulty that the soul is set free."[16]

We cannot prove beyond doubt that Christ was a Cynic. Perhaps the source of the Synoptic Gospels, *i.e.,* Apostle Peter or John Mark, was a Cynic who injected his beliefs into the Gospels. Some of the Cynic writings that Downing relied on were written after Christ's lifetime, and this could mean that Cynics borrowed some Christian teachings, as well as vice versa.

The "Jesus was a Cynic" theory has gotten lost in the shuffle of the more popular alternative theories about Christ. It nevertheless raises some interesting questions:

How diverse was Christ's spiritual education?

To what lengths did he go to obtain it?

Such questions are controversial to those Christians who believe that Jesus' wisdom came directly from God without the assistance of a human education. In *John* 7: 15-16 (NIV), we read:

> The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?"
>
> Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him [*i.e.*, God] who sent me."

Although Christ's accusers thought that he had not been formally educated, Jesus only said that his teachings were not his own. That could still mean that he was preaching a wisdom learned from others, but he believed that God had directed him to those teachings just as some people today feel guided by divine providence or fate to read or learn certain things.

Meetings

Orion's wife arrived at GTA just minutes after five.

"Serena!" Brenda greeted her in the lobby with a peck on the cheek. "Carl and I adored that Belgian vase you gave us. The colors are exquisite."

"I'm so glad," Serena sighed with relief. "I wasn't sure if that violet hue was too strong. Not to change the subject, but tell me about this 'Mr. Christ.'"

"Oh, he's a darling, but if he is who he says he is, I doubt that tonight's dinner party will agree with him. *The Calling Game* is about Tibetan Buddhists."

"Oh, that's right," Serena frowned. "I hope he won't be offended."

"Just between you and me," Brenda confided, "I think this Hollywood thing for Tibet has gone too far. I'm all for Tibetan independence, but honestly, a thriller about a Dalai Lama who wins back his country with kung fu and a machine gun?"

"At least you have an excuse to pass it up. Be sure to give me a play-by-play on Rompaul's reading tonight."

"Will do."

Brenda departed as Serena hurried to her husband's office.

"Sweetheart!" Orion called out. "Come and meet our dinner guest! Joe, this is my wife and soulmate, Serena."

Joe stood and took her hand. With his other hand, he stroked her cheek just once. Serena felt her face grow warm, and her pulse quickened as a sudden sense of recognition overcame her. Had she once met this man? Orion noticed his wife's expression and felt a spark of jealousy. He turned to Joe, and the spark turned into a flash fire. It was clear that Joe had an instant connection to Serena.

"Mr. Christ," she greeted him warmly, "I've heard so much about you. But of course everybody's heard a lot about you. Did my husband call you 'Joe?'"

"The pleasure of this meeting is entirely mine," Joe smiled. "And yes, Joe is my nickname."

"I'll explain on the way," Orion interjected. "Let's boogie over to the restaurant."

As they walked toward the door, Serena paused to stare at her husband's legs.

"Why, honey!" she exclaimed. "Dr. Cohen was right!"

"Huh?" Orion puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"He said that your limp would eventually go away, and look, it has!"

"You're right! I'm surprised I hadn't even noticed. Another miracle of modern medicine."

Joe sat in the back of the Rolls as the agent chauffeured. From the passenger seat, Serena regaled her guest with the story of how she and Orion had met. Her glowing words made Orion feel less threatened by Joe's presence.

"It warms my heart to hear the happiness in your voice," Joe congratulated her. "It is one of life's greatest blessings to find such companionship."

Joe's words struck a deep and unexplained chord in her. She suddenly felt as though she had once lost something terribly precious, but now that "something" was with her again in the car. Serena glanced at Joe, and there was a gentle look in his eyes as though he understood the source of her feeling.

"Ryan," Serena suddenly remembered, "did you tell Joe that dinner tonight is for a movie about Buddhists?"

"Oh, that's right!" the agent exclaimed. "You'll have to forgive me, but I completely forgot. I didn't mean to be so thoughtless. We'll skip Spago and go somewhere else."

"Please!" Joe interrupted. "Be assured that I will not stand up and prophesy against the Buddhists. After all, there are some who say that the Buddha and I had much in common."

Chapter 12

Jesus: The Buddhist

The world of A.D. 1 was a dynamic one. Palestine was linked to a transcontinental trade network that stretched from the Spanish Peninsula on the Atlantic Ocean to China on the Pacific. At least half a dozen sea routes linked India's west coast to the Middle East. Just as many land routes connected India to the Roman Empire. By the first century A.D., trade was so brisk that Roman aristocrat Pliny complained of an imbalance. India's spices, jewels, cloth and exotic animals were costing the Romans a fortune in gold.

Trade in material goods brings an exchange of ideas. Boats and caravans from India carried stories of Hindu mystics and Buddhist philosophers to spark the curiosity of Greeks, Romans, and Palestinians. Some of the people who traveled from Palestine to India were on a quest for spiritual treasure, and they found it mostly in three religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

Hinduism

Hinduism is a melting pot of different religious ideas brought together over a period of centuries. Hinduism's earliest teachings go back thousands of years before Christ. Most Hindu sects today hold a common belief that we are all timeless immortal souls ("atmans") who live many lifetimes in a repeating cycle of birth, death, and rebirth until liberation from that cycle is achieved as the result of moral living. Spiritual salvation is when the atman completely escapes from physical matter and is reunited with the Universal Spirit (the "Brahman"). According to some Hindu teachings, the universe (*i.e.*, physical matter) is just an illusion. Many Hindus are vegetarians in a belief that animal bodies are animated by souls just like human bodies.

Hinduism changed around the year 1500 B.C. when Aryan tribes invaded the Indian subcontinent from the west. The Aryans were lighter-skinned people who established an oppressive social system in India that divided the population into "castes," *i.e.*, social classes into which people were born and could not leave. The caste system was justified by saying that people are born into certain castes as a consequence of how they had progressed spiritually in

previous lifetimes. The Aryan priests were naturally the most spiritually advanced and therefore worthy of their exalted positions. People in the lower castes deserved their poverty and menial jobs. This mix of theology and caste became the Hinduism that existed during Jesus' time and which still influences India today.

Buddhism

Buddhism was founded by Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama (born *c.*560 B.C.). Dissatisfied with his pampered life and yearning to solve the problem of human suffering, Siddhartha abandoned his royal home as a young man and launched a quest that culminated in spiritual enlightenment six years later. As a result of his success, Prince Siddhartha became the "Buddha" (the "Enlightened One").

The humble dress and life style of Buddhist monks cause many outsiders to mistakenly believe that Buddhism is a primitive religion, but its extensive philosophy is quite sophisticated and summarized as the Four Noble Truths:

1. Life is suffering, *i.e.,* the world is inherently unsatisfactory.

2. The cause of suffering is desire: "a gnawing dissatisfaction with what is and a concomitant [*i.e.,* simultaneous] reaching out for something else. So we can never be at rest but are always grasping for something outside ourselves...driving us on from one moment to the next, one life to the next."[1]

3. We can be liberated from this suffering. That state of liberation is called "nirvana."

4. The path to that liberation exists.

Siddhartha's road to nirvana (salvation) consists of three parts: wisdom, morality, and meditation. This is further broken down into eight goals known as the Noble Eightfold Path:

1. Right understanding; especially understanding the world as it really is without delusion.
2. Right thought.
3. Right speech.
4. Right action.
5. Right livelihood.
6. Right effort.
7. Right mindfulness

8. Right concentration.

The Buddha taught at a time when the caste system was deeply entrenched. Although he did not develop his teachings as an overt rebellion against Hinduism, it was clear that the caste system and Aryan gods played no role in the Buddhist path.

Siddhartha lived to the ripe old age of 80 when he died a natural death. His last words are reported to be, "Decay is inherent in all component things; work out your salvation with diligence."[2]

Did Siddhartha believe in the existence of an immortal human soul? Most Buddhist writings say that he did not. In *What the Buddha Taught,* Buddhist monk Walpola Rahula emphasizes:

> It must be repeated here that according to Buddhist philosophy there is no permanent unchanging spirit which can be considered "Self," or "Soul," or "Ego," as opposed to [physical] matter, and that consciousness (*viñña¯na*) should not be taken as "spirit" in opposition to matter. This point has to be particularly emphasized, because a wrong notion that consciousness is a sort of Self or Soul that continues as a permanent substance through life, has persisted from the earliest time to the present day.[3]

What many Buddhists believe is that a person's consciousness arises out of the so-called "Five Aggregates," each one leading to the next: physical matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. In other words, personal consciousness (the sense of "I") ultimately depends upon the existence of physical matter, and so there is no such thing as spiritual existence without the material universe.

It has been argued that this is a serious misinterpretation of Buddha's teachings. Buddhism teaches that a person's consciousness continues beyond the death of the body. Tibetan Buddhists commonly seek the reincarnations of their dead leaders in living children. The Buddha himself was said to have reviewed his past lives as he arrived at enlightenment. The bottom line is that Buddhists believe that personal consciousness survives bodily death and remanifests itself in other bodies. That is the essential definition of a soul. Modern Buddhists are really arguing about where souls come from. There is also a teaching ascribed to Siddhartha

that seems to acknowledge a timeless entity (or immortal soul) that is quite separate from the material universe:

> ...there is an unborn, unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned. Were there not the unborn, unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned, there would be no escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned. Since there is the unborn, unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned, there is escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned.[4]

As we can see, some elements of Buddhist theology can be interpreted in different ways just like Christianity. This is not surprising when we consider that Buddhism and Christianity share an identical problem. Everything we know about Siddhartha's teachings are, at best, secondhand accounts that were written down, interpreted, and translated after his death. Like Jesus, Siddhartha apparently did not physically record his teachings, or if he did, they did not survive. Buddhism underwent revisions of doctrine by councils that met more than a century after his death. It is unlikely that we know Siddhartha's precise lessons.

Jainism

Jainism is the smallest of the three major religions of India with 3.5 to 10 million practicing members today. Although this is a respectable number, it is a mere handful compared to at least 750 million Hindus and 300 million Buddhists.

Jainism was founded about the same time as Buddhism. "Jain" comes from "Jina" which means "conqueror." However, Jains are famous for their doctrine of nonviolence and belief that no living thing should be harmed. They say that people are immortal souls that reincarnate into human bodies. "Karma" (*i.e.*, the effects of one's acts upon oneself) attaches to the soul and physically weighs it down. This dulls the soul and causes it to lose awareness of its wise and blissful nature. Jains seek liberation from karma and reincarnation so that they can escape the "celestial [*i.e.*, material] world" and enter a pure region where liberated souls dwell. The Jain road to salvation is summarized as the Three Jewels: right faith, right knowledge, and right conduct.

A popular theory about Jesus is that he traveled to India during his Missing Years to study eastern religion. In 1894, political writer and traveler Nicolas Notovitch published a book in France entitled *The Unknown Life of Christ*. Notovitch's work contains translations of scattered passages that he claimed to have seen in two ancient Buddhist volumes located at the Hemis monastery in the Ladakh region of the Himalayas. The passages tell of a man named "Issa," which was a name given to Jesus in the Far East. "Issa" is apparently based on either the Greek name for Jesus ("Iesous") or the Roman variation ("Iesus"). The records Notovitch saw were not originals, but were compilations of older writings that had originally been penned only three or four years after Christ's crucifixion by Indian merchants who were returning to India from Palestine...or at least that is what Notovitch believed.

Upon his return to Europe, Notovitch spent time putting the scattered verses into chronological order, "imprinting a character of unity to the entire work,"[5] and giving his unified translation the title *The Life of Saint Issa, The Best of the Sons of Men* (hereafter referred to as *St. Issa*, for short.) Here is a summary of Notovitch's "Buddhist gospel":

Saint Issa begins with a short history of the Jewish people. The Exodus story has a unique slant: Moses was one of the Egyptian Pharaoh's two natural sons, but he converted to Judaism. The Pharaoh ordered Moses to take the Israelites out of Egypt because they were the cause of many misfortunes.

Saint Issa skips ahead to the birth of Issa into a poor family as the result of God's decision to "incarnate himself in a human being."[6] Issa displayed a profound intellect as a child and "spoke of the nothingness of the body and the grandeur of the soul."[7] Issa intended to:

> ...teach us, by his example, how we may reach a state of moral purity and separate the soul from its gross envelope [*i.e.*, from the human body], that it may attain the perfection necessary to enter the Kingdom of Heaven which is immutable [*i.e.*, never-changing] and where eternal happiness reigns.[8]

At the age of 13, Issa ran away from home and joined a group of merchants on a trip to the Far East so that he could learn the wisdom of the Buddha. Upon reaching India, Issa first studied Jainism and gained fame for his wisdom. He was then tutored by Hindu priests (Brahmans).

Issa's tenure with the Brahmans did not go well. He disliked the caste system, and after six years he started preaching against the Brahmans and warrior class, so they decided to murder him. Issa discovered the plot and fled to the mountains where the Buddha had been born. There he learned the Pali language and mastered the Buddhist scriptures during six additional years of study. Issa then made a slow journey back to Palestine via Persia, preaching along the way.

Once back in Roman-occupied lands, Issa continued preaching for another three years. Pilate became alarmed at Issa's popularity, sent out spies, and had him arrested and crucified alongside two thieves. After a day on the cross, Issa died and went to heaven as a soul. His dead body was removed and placed in a tomb. Three days later, Pilate dispatched soldiers to bury Issa's body in order to prevent an uprising, but the corpse was gone. A rumor arose that angels had taken it away. *St. Issa* does not say that the body was resurrected or that Issa made any appearances after death.

Saint Issa concludes with a report that his disciples went out and gained many converts.

Notovitch's writing suggests that Jesus had become a spiritual rebel at a young age and almost lost his life in India because of it. When he returned to Palestine years later, his unorthodox ways caught up with him and he literally "got nailed."

Should we believe the Notovitch gospel?

One of his detractors was Oxford professor Max Müller—a renowned Christian and Indiologist. Müller wrote an article for *The Nineteenth Century* magazine (October 1894 issue) where he noted the statement of a British colonial officer that there was no documentation of Notovitch even visiting Ladakh. Müller also learned that the two central document catalogs used by the Tibetan Buddhists did not list any works about the life of Issa.

A year after Müller's article, J. Archibald Douglas—a teacher at the government college in Agra, India—went to Ladakh to investigate Notovitch's story. Unlike Müller, Douglas was able to confirm Notovitch's presence in Ladakh through a missionary named Dr. Karl Marx*. On the other hand, the abbot (lama) of Hemis denied ever meeting Notovitch and was not aware of any Tibetan writings containing the name Issa.

Notovitch launched a vigorous defense. He repeated what he had said all along: the Issa passages were disconnected and mixed in with other historical events completely unrelated to Issa, and so it is unlikely that they would show up in document catalogues. The Buddhist catalogues described by Müller listed only about 2,000 documents, but one monastery alone held over 100,000. Other people have noted that Notovitch could have been mistaken about the title of the man who had shown him the Buddhist books: Notovitch was communicating through translators, and miscommunication on this point could have easily occurred.**

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* This was not the same Karl Marx who cofounded communism. Dr. Marx of Kashmir had treated Notovitch for a toothache.

** A later Notovitch debunker was Professor Goodspeed in his book *Modern Apocrypha.* Goodspeed accused Notovitch of glibness and dishonesty: "In his [*i.e.*, Notovitch's] first preface he spoke of the monastic libraries as 'containing a few copies of the manuscript in question.' But later it was of no use to look for the manuscript, he intimated, for there was no manuscript; and he lightly referred serious students of his supposed discovery to 'verses scattered through more than one book, without any title.'"[9] Two later debunkers, namely Per Beskow *(Strange Tales About Jesus,* 1983) and Ron Rhodes *(The Counterfeit Christ of the New Age Movement,* 1990) echoed Goodspeed's criticism. It appears, however, that these later debunkers misinterpreted Goodspeed's criticism to mean that Notovitch had claimed in his first edition that the Issa story was in a single Buddhist manuscript, but after Müller pointed out that no Issa manuscripts could be found in the Buddhist indexes, Notovitch changed his story in a later edition to say that the Issa passages were scattered throughout other documents. This would indeed be damaging to Notovitch's credibility, but that is not what he did, and that is not what Goodspeed was trying to say:

In an 1894 English edition of *St. Issa* (the Alexina Loranger translation first published by Rand, McNally & Co.), we do indeed find the passage quoted by Prof. Goodspeed about 'the manuscript [singular] in

The controversy would be easily solved if other people had seen the Issa texts. Has anyone corroborated Notovitch's claims?

Nearly eighty years prior to Notovitch's Himalayan trek, a man named Meer Izzut-oolah of the British East India Company was in Ladakh on business and learned of ancient writings about Christ in Tibet. His words marginally support Notovitch:

> I was informed by an aged man that he had ascertained beyond all doubts that some portions of the Bible had been revealed to the Tibetans. They assert that their original scripture was in a language that has now become unintelligible.[11]

Direct verification came in 1922 when Swami Abhedananda of India went to the Himalayas to view the Jesus passages after reading *St. Issa*. The Swami's adventures are described in his book *Journey Into Kashmir and Tibet*. His translations are nearly identical to Notovitch's except for differences in nuance and occasional details. For example, the Swami found a passage about Christ's physical appearance at age fourteen that Notovitch did not have: Jesus was an attractive youth, "his benign appearance, face radiating peace, and comely forehead attracted Jain devotees who knew him to be one who had received blessings from God Himself."[12]

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question,' but two paragraphs later Notovitch mentions seeing "manuscripts [plural] related to Christ."[10] Near the end of that very same edition, Notovitch says that the Issa passages were scattered throughout unrelated texts. In other words, even before Müller's article was published, Notovitch had been consistent in his statements that the Issa passages were distributed in different Buddhist texts. It is true that Notovitch changed the preface of the 1895 edition to defend against the criticism of Müller and others, but that new preface only emphasized what he had already made clear in the first edition. Goodspeed was merely nitpicking about a single sentence in the first edition and how it seemed to conflict with later statements *in the same edition*. Even this nitpick, however, is not persuasive because the reference to a single manuscript was made by a Tibetan to Notovitch *before* Notovitch actually saw that passages were scattered throughout more than one book.

The differences between the Notovitch and Abhedananda translations can be explained by Abhedananda's report that he saw a different translation (in Tibetan) of the same work that had been viewed by Notovitch decades earlier written in Pali and stored in another monastery. Both men had the documents translated for them by people at the respective monasteries. The Swami published passages that Notovitch apparently did not see, and vice versa, and this further supports the existence of scattered passages that were seen by different people at different times.

Painter/mystic Nicholas Roerich visited Ladakh in the 1920s where he claimed to see a 1500-year-old Tibetan manuscript containing Jesus verses. Roerich's testimony was not particularly helpful because he only quoted one abbreviated set of verses found in Notovitch, as well as verses from a 1908 channeled work called *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* by Levi (Leo W.) Dowling.

Even a former U.S. Supreme Court Justice got into the act. William O. Douglas wrote *Beyond the High Himalayas* about his 1951 visit to Hemis and the legends he heard relating to Jesus.

Do the Issa documents still exist today? It is difficult to say. Abhedananda's disciple Swami Prajnananda was interviewed in the 1970's, and he said that both he and his master were told by monastery personnel years after Abhedananda's original visit that the texts were no longer there. In *A Search for the Historical Jesus,* Professor Fida M. Hassnain reports that he made several trips to Hemis beginning in 1963 to locate the Jesus passages. Hassnain could not find them, but he did come across and photograph two pages from the original diary of Dr. Karl Marx in which Notovitch's visit to Ladakh is noted. A certain U. Eichstadt supposedly saw the Jesus documents in 1974. Professor Robert S. Ravicz visited Hemis in the following year and was told by a doctor friend that the monastery possessed writings stating that Jesus had been to Hemis. In the late 1970's, Edward F. Noach was at Hemis where a lama informed him that a manuscript telling the story of Jesus' pilgrimage to Ladakh was in a storeroom. To date, no one has obtained photographs of the actual texts*.

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* Elisabeth Caspari of Montessori School fame also claims to have seen the Buddhist documents. She said during an interview that she had gone

Saint Issa contains internal elements that support its credibility. If some of it was based on the reports of Indian merchants who were passing through Palestine within just a few years of the crucifixion, we would expect to find (as we do) a report that Christ had died without a resurrection: Christians did not widely preach a resurrection religion until later. If Jesus' body had disappeared from the tomb, stories about it would have come from Pilate's soldiers as *St. Issa* suggests. Does this mean that *St. Issa* is a fully accurate telling of Jesus' life? Notovitch had this to say:

> The two manuscripts read to me by the lama of the Himis Convent were compiled from diverse copies written in the Thibetan tongue, translated from rolls belonging to the Lassa library and brought from India, Nepal, and Maghada *200 years after Christ.* These were placed in a convent standing on Mount Marbour, near Lassa [the capital of Tibet], where the Dalai-Lama now resides.[13] (Emphasis added).

This means that Notovitch saw translations that were made almost two hundred years after the events they describe. By then, Christian missionaries had already reached India with their orthodox teachings. If Buddhist Issa stories had been recorded both before and after the orthodox impact on India, we would expect to see early Tibetan stories without an orthodox slant, and the later ones with one. That is exactly what Notovitch claims he saw: the first Buddhist volume shown to him contained no claims that Issa was blessed or an incarnation of God: such claims did not appear until near the end of the second Buddhist volume.

When Notovitch arranged all of the passages to create *St. Issa,* he did so in a way that followed the New Testament story. That was a big mistake. He should have published the passages absolutely verbatim and in the sequence he found them. Notovitch only gave us his edited and rearranged version, and this opened the door to legitimate skepticism.

to Ladakh in 1939 where her group was shown ancient Tibetan writings that mention Christ's travels there. Someone in her travel party took a photograph of the temple librarian holding the documents. Unfortunately, no one bothered to take pictures of the actual text, and Ms. Caspari had no translations made, so it is not possible to know if the papers really contained references to Issa. (See Prophet's *The Lost Years of Jesus.*)

There is another "Tibetan gospel" about Christ called *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve.* It was apparently first published in the 19th century. *Holy Twelve* is a complete story from Jesus' birth through his Ascension that supposedly contains information derived from an Essene document that had been placed for safekeeping in a Buddhist monastery in Tibet. *Holy Twelve* contains recognizable stories from the New Testament and apocrypha, along with some intriguing tidbits not found elsewhere. Unfortunately, the anonymous editor assembled *Holy Twelve* as a "complete Gospel" that mixed New Testament writings, the alleged translations from Tibet, and purported divine revelations received by several well-known mystics, including Emmanuel Swedenborg. For this reason, *Holy Twelve* is essentially useless to historians.

Is it really likely that a Palestinian Jew would have traveled to the Far East during Christ's time?

Jews had already migrated to Asia during the great "Diaspora" ("Dispersion") *c.*700 B.C. and 600-500 B.C. Some Afghani tribes still trace their genealogy to Old Testament Hebrew prophets. Diaspora Jews also settled in northern India, including in the Kashmir region where the Hemis monastery is located. In fact, the name "Kashmir" may come from the Jewish Kassite tribe. Kashmir hosts a monastery that claims to hold the rod of Moses; according to a regional legend, he had gone there to die. Many people of Kashmir wear their hair in the Jewish manner, and Kashmiri boatmen still use a heart-shaped paddle that was only found elsewhere in the Middle East. Jesus may have utilized this far-flung Jewish network during his Missing Years.

There are enough similarities between Christ and the Buddha to cause some people to wonder if Jesus had found inspiration in the story of the Eastern sage:

1. Both of them were wandering preachers who did not have a central place of teaching. They attracted loyal disciples who traveled with them.

2. Both rejected wealth and said that obsessive materialism stood in the way of spiritual salvation.

3. Jesus's idea of "turning the other cheek" echoes Buddhist pacifism.

4. The New Testament gospels and an earlier Buddhist text (the *Kalapanamandinaka* (4:22)), both contain a similar parable about a poor woman whose small offering is more worthy of praise than a lavish gift from a wealthy person because hers is a sacrifice.

5. The Buddha accepted everyone into his ministry regardless of their caste or social status, and this was contrary to the rules of the region's dominant sect, namely the Hindus. Jesus also accepted everyone into his ministry.

6. The Buddha and Jesus were said to have obtained much of their early enlightenment during times of isolated meditation. The Buddha received his under a tree and Jesus in the desert. During those times, both were visited and tempted by evil entities.

7. Both rejected ritual washing (which is not the same as baptism). They taught instead that people commit evil through what they do, and therefore purity comes through improvement of the self and not through cleansing rituals.

8. Jesus spoke against religious hypocrites when he said, "Woe to you, teachers of the law...You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean." (*Matthew* 23: 27, NIV). Siddhartha denounced Indian prophets who put on a facade of being holy but "within is a jungle."[14]

9. The Buddha performed miracles that Christ later copied, namely walking on water (see *Dighanikaya, Majjhimanikaya,* and *Mahavagga)* and feeding multitudes with a small amount of bread (*Jataka* 78). The ability of special people to walk on water is also mentioned in Hindu writings.

Many scholars doubt that there was a Buddhist influence on early Christianity. They see a different scenario: after Christianity spread to Asia, Buddhists (and members of other Asian faiths) adopted some Christian beliefs and practices. The miracles of Christ were later said to be the miracles of the Buddha, and not vice versa. There is no firm evidence to disprove this theory since it is difficult to find reliable Buddhist records that can be dated with total certainty to a time before Christ. It is not always possible to tell when a specific point of Buddhist theology or legend was developed.

Another variation of the "Jesus Went to India" theory is that he studied the ideas of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (*c.*500 B.C.).

Painfully little is known about Lao Tzu, and some historians think that he was a myth. Legend says that he was keeper of the imperial archives in the Chinese state of K'uhsuien, but he became so disenchanted with civilization that he quit his job, climbed onto a water buffalo, and rode west toward Tibet to begin a life of solitude. When he reached the Hankao Pass, a gate keeper tried to dissuade the elderly Lao Tzu from becoming a hermit at his age, but Lao Tzu had made up his mind. The gate keeper told the would-be hermit to record his philosophies and beliefs before abandoning the world, so Lao Tzu returned three days later with his book, the *Tao Te Ching (The Way and Its Power).* Lao Tzu then passed the gate and was never heard from again. The *Tao Te Ching* remains a religious classic. Is it possible that Jesus studied it?

There are many similarities between the sayings of Christ and Lao Tzu. For example, Jesus is quoted, "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (*Matthew* 18:3). The *Tao Te Ching* says, "Being the stream of the universe, ever true and unswerving, become as a little child once more." (*Tao Te Ching* 28). Jesus: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (*Matthew* 5:5). Lao Tzu: "Heaven arms with gentleness those it would not see destroyed." (*Tao Te Ching* 67). Many more similarities can be found. (See, *e.g., Jesus and Lao Tzu, The Parallel Sayings* (Martin Aronson, ed.))

The "Jesus Studied in India" theory is not necessarily as controversial as it sounds. It simply means that Christ did what so many other people have been doing for centuries: he studied the religions, histories, and cultures of other people. Today, large bookstores and libraries have religion sections where all of us can go to learn about other people's beliefs. In Christ's time, people had the same interests, but they needed to work harder and travel farther to get the information. That Jesus may have done so hardly seems remarkable.

The Throw-Away

Thirty people associated with *The Calling Game* were milling about Spago with drinks and hors d'oeuvres when Orion, Serena, and Joe arrived.

The Calling Game was a formula action picture about a fictitious Dalai Lama in exile who is scheduled to address the United Nations. He falls in love with a young female FBI agent assigned to protect him. An assassin's bullet intended for him kills the young lady, and this enrages the Dalai Lama so much that he gives up trying to find a peaceful solution. He secretly parachutes into Tibet with a group of misfit mercenaries who carry out a weapons-blazing commando operation that sets his country free. During the last battle, he confronts the young lady's assassin on a temple roof and sends him plummeting to his death with a foot blow to the head. The action star who played the Dalai Lama received $30 million up front plus 2.75 percent of the gross, all negotiated by Orion. The real Dalai Lama declined to be a consultant for the movie.

"Serena," Orion said, "why don't you take Joe to meet Ben and Carrie. I'm going to huddle with Bernie a few minutes."

Orion walked over to the film's producer who was sharing martinis with a Japanese man.

"Orie! You son of a gun!" Bernie greeted him. "Meet Makuto from the Tokyo Moon Holding Corporation. They're invested heavily in Capital City which fronted a big chunk for this picture. Makuto, this is Orie Shaw—the agent who signed Bulldog to star for you."

"My pleasure, Mr. Shaw," Makuto smiled. "We are eager for other investments. Perhaps you will join us for discussions next week."

"We'll connect Monday and coordinate our calendars," Orion promised.

"Makuto," Bernie said, "would you please give me a moment with Orie? We need to finish one little item of business."

"Of course," the Japanese guest replied with a hint of relief. He was star-struck and eager to mingle.

"What's your prognosis on this baby?" Orion asked Bernie quietly. "You've never produced a big-budget clunker, but I have to wonder about this one."

"Who knows? I know it's ridiculous showing the Dalai Lama firing a grenade launcher, but maybe the kids will like it. This one's a throwaway that I'm doing as part of a three-picture joint venture with Tokyo Moon. I'm really banking on the next two. Makuto says that this one will go over big in Asia because of Bulldog even if it tanks here, so it's probably safe. Hey, who's the talent you walked in with? I thought I knew everybody you overcharge for there at GTA."

"Brace yourself," Orion dropped his voice to a conspiratorial murmur. "Serena tells me that you've heard the buzz from New York."

"What about?"

"I'll give you a hint. The initials are J.C."

"What?! So that's the face behind the rumors. How do I know he's legit? You know that my religion doesn't even believe in Christ's *first* time around, don't you? Why should I even listen?"

"It's your choice, but to make it sweet, I'll give you a low lock-in: quarter-million for the option. If he isn't the real deal, that's all you lose."

Bernie glanced over at Joe who was seated in animated conversation with Serena and three others. Bernie turned his gaze back to Orion and spoke with determination.

"Meet me tomorrow. My house. Noon. You. Him."

The producer squeezed Orion's shoulder and walked away to greet *The Calling Game's* director who had just entered with a young star hanging on his arm. Orion returned to Serena and companions. They were being regaled with the spiritual insights of the young lady who played the FBI agent.

"The Celts knew all the secret wisdom of the ancient world," she lectured authoritatively. "They preserved it in their stone designs, but we haven't learned to decipher them yet."

Orion groaned inwardly. Things "Celtic" were popular: Celtic music, Celtic dance, Celtic design, and now Joe was being bombarded with this woman's dubious version of Celtic religion.

"Celtic wise men traveled around the civilized world," she continued. "Jesus Christ was their greatest emissary."

"Really!" Serena exclaimed and turned to Joe. "Is that true? Were you, I mean was Christ, a Celtic teacher?"

Chapter 13

Jesus: The Druid

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the Holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

Excerpt from *The Glastonbury Hymn*
by William Blake, 1757-1827

Tin.

The thought of it hardly excites the imagination, but tin is a surprising element that may link Christ to the islands known today as the United Kingdom.

Tin was a valuable commodity in the first century. It was used to create metal alloys for weapons and other metalwork. Britain was an important supplier of tin in those days, and so there was a brisk trade between Britain and the eastern Mediterranean. Some historians believe that commerce in tin may have begun as early as 1500 B.C.

According to British legends, a major player in the ancient metals trade was Joseph of Arimathea—the man who arranged the release of Jesus' body from the cross. Early Latin versions of the New Testament gospels call him a "noble decurion"—a title given to Roman mining ministers. Traditions from several mining towns of southern England say that Arimathea owned some of the tin mines there. To oversee them, he made regular business trips to Britain from his home in Palestine. Other English traditions add that he owned a fleet of ships and was one of the wealthiest men of his time. These legends were so popular with British tin miners that even in the twentieth century they sang a song with the refrain, "Joseph was in the tin trade."

The New Testament says that Arimathea was a "distinguished member" of the Sanhedrin (Jewish high council) that had demanded Christ's death (*Mark* 15:43), but Joseph was a secret follower of Christ (*John* 19:38). A tradition still mentioned in the Eastern Orthodox Church and some British churches is that he was Jesus' maternal great uncle, *i.e.*, a younger brother of Mary's father.

The New Testament gospels support the idea of a family connection between Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus. It is puzzling, for example, that Pilate handed over the body of a crucified public enemy to Arimathea. As Rev. Dobson points out in *Did Our Lord Visit Britain as they say in Cornwall and Somerset?*, this riddle is solved if Arimathea had a family connection to Christ:

> Both Roman and Jewish law laid it down as a duty for the nearest relatives to dispose of the dead irrespective of how they had died... Joseph, if a relative, would be obeying the law, both Jewish and Roman, and fulfilling a duty, and Pilate could give ready consent without fear of giving offence.[1]

Jesus' father Joseph disappears from the New Testament after Christ is twelve years old, suggesting that he died well before Jesus started preaching. Mother Mary was still alive, and it would have made sense for her powerful uncle to help the family. He may have even become a legal guardian for the family under Jewish law.

A beloved English legend is that Jesus, as a youth, had accompanied Arimathea on one of his voyages there. This legend is found primarily in the southern English regions of Cornwall, Somerset, Priddy, and Glastonbury. In fact, some people there still use the expression, "As sure as Our Lord was at Priddy." This legend is reinforced by a remarkable letter from St. Augustine to Pope Gregory written A.D. 600 indicating that the first Christians to arrive in western Britain found an altar there built by Christ's own hands.

According to one version of the legend, Arimathea and Jesus journeyed from Palestine and through the Bristol Channel to arrive at what is known today as Mount Saint Michael in southern England. They continued by boat to the Somerset coast and disembarked at either Burnham or Uphill. Their ultimate destination was either Glastonbury or Burnham. It is uncertain why Jesus accompanied his uncle, but it obviously would have been an exciting adventure for a bright-eyed youth.

A less-common version of the legend in Cornwall says that Jesus went to England with his mother, perhaps to visit his maternal grandmother Anne who lived in England. (See chapter 15).

Hachette's *Guide Bleu, Bretagne* reports a tradition that Christ had been to England several times for this purpose. Another version from upper Galilee is that Jesus had served as a young shipwright aboard a trading vessel bound for England, and he became stormbound on the shores of western England for a winter.

The credibility of the English legend is enhanced by the fact that it comes primarily from the mining towns. Other locales along Christ's travel route that have little or no mining activity do not have traditions of him visiting. Many English tin miners were Jews, and that makes it plausible that a Sanhedrin member from Palestine (namely Arimathea) owned some of the mines.

The ancient people of Britain, Ireland, Wales, the English highlands, Isle of Man, and Gaul (France) are generally referred to as Celts. The Celts began as a group of Central European tribes that had migrated widely, including into the British Isles. Roman Emperor Julius Caesar (*d.*44 B.C.) denounced them as barbarians, but apologists point out that he wanted to invade their lands, and so his opinion was probably little more than propaganda. Historians have determined that England had a sophisticated culture during Christ's era boasting as many as forty universities and 60,000 students in southern England alone. Their education included mathematics, astronomy, natural science, medicine, poetry, law, and religion. Most of it was overseen by members of a large religious sect, the Druids, that constituted the Celtic learned class and served as civil leaders and judges. Anyone who conducted substantial business or pursued religious matters in England and Gaul would inevitably deal with the Druids. In fact, some wealthy families in Rome, Greece, and elsewhere sent their children to study under the Druids in Britain.

The word "Druid" comes from *dru-wid*, which is thought to mean "deep knowledge" or "knowledge of the oak." (Druids often performed religious ceremonies in oak groves). The earliest known mention of Druidism is found in the writings of Sotion of Alexandria *c.*200 B.C., but the Druids said that their order was founded eighteen hundred years earlier *c.*2000 B.C. Druids are portrayed in Welsh and Irish legends as sorcerers and soothsayers, but it would be more correct to describe them as philosophers/metaphysicians

whose best-known spiritual doctrine was transmigration—a belief described by Julius Caesar:

> A lesson which they take particular pains to inculcate is that the soul does not perish, but after death passes from one body to another; they think that this is the best incentive to bravery, because it teaches men to disregard the terrors of death.[2]

This belief was so strong that Druids sometimes made contracts to pay a debt in the next lifetime.

Many Druids had an excellent command of the Greek language and studied Greek philosophy. Celtic parents sometimes surrendered their children to be raised by Druid priests, similar to the practice of the Essenes.

For such an educated group, it is peculiar that the Druids forbade their teachings from being written down. Their students had to learn and teach everything from memory. This helps explain why the British did not start recording their own history until five centuries after Christ. The Druids of Ireland were an exception, but after Christianity became established there, many Irishmen followed the unfortunate example set by St. Patrick in the fifth century A.D. by destroying every Druidic book they could find.

Not everything about the Druids was goodness and light, at least according to Roman writers. In his work *The Gallic War*, Julius Caesar alleges that the Druids practiced a gruesome form of mass-execution: they would build an enormous edifice out of wicker in the shape of a man, cram condemned people inside, and then set it on fire. Other dismal types of execution, atrocity, and sacrifice were reported by outside contemporaries such as Diodorus Siculus (21 B.C.), Strabo (64/3 B.C-A.D. 21), and Tacitus (*c.*A.D. 55-*c.*115).

Scholars have tried to determine the source of Druidic theology. Some conclude that the Druids and the Brahmans of India had common origins in an earlier Indo-European priesthood.

If Jesus had sailed to Britain with his wealthy great uncle, he would have come into contact with the Druids. Is it possible that he was taught Druidism in England during the Missing Years?

According to Rev. R. W. Morgan in *St. Paul in Britain* (and repeated in Dobson's *Did Our Lord Visit Britain as they say in Cornwall and Somerset?)*, the Druids of Christ's day taught a concept echoed in modern Catholicism: God exists as a Trinity. One part of the Druidic Trinity was a future Messiah called Esu or Yesu. ("Jesus" is a variation of "Yesu.") In *The Drama of the Lost Disciples,* Jowett claims, "the actual name of Jesus was familiar to them [*i.e.,* to the Druids] long before the advent of Christ. They were the only people to know it and say it, a fact that has astounded students of theology."[3] A Celtic French legend tells of a pre-Christian vision from heaven in which a virgin would give birth to a child, and this inspired a group of Druids to create a wooden carving of a mother with an infant on her knees. The statue was placed in a grotto at Chartres, and when the first known Christians arrived there in the third century A.D., they built a church at the site and revered the carving as the Black Virgin. Many people believe that the Virgin's skin became black due to the aging of the wood, but this is not certain since Black Virgins and Black Madonnas were abundant, as we will see in the next chapter.

As noted in chapter 8, the Essenes closely resembled the Greek Pythagoreans, and it turns out that the Druids also had contacts with the Pythagoreans. (See, *e.g.,* Peter Ellis' *The Druids* and J. Matthews' *The Druid Source Book).* This reveals at least an indirect, but possibly direct, connection between the Essenes and Druids. If Jesus had been groomed for a Messianic role by the Essenes, affiliated Druids may have told him that he was "Yesu," the predicted Druid Messiah. The 15th-century work *Leabhar Breac* tells of an old Irish tradition in which father Joseph saw the wise men approaching the newborn Christ and assumed from their behavior and colorful garb that they were Druids.

The possible connection between Druids and Essenes may trace back to an earlier time in Egypt. In his massive two-volume *Book of the Beginnings*, Gerald Massey devotes the entire first book to demonstrating that Egyptians had reached England before the Christian era. According to his analysis, Egyptians introduced many words, practices and religious beliefs that were adopted and transformed by the Druids. In chapter 9, we noted that some elements of Essenism also had Egyptian roots.

Another influence on Druidism may have been Buddhism. Buddhist missionaries were sent forth by Asian Emperor Asoka to convert the world, and some of them reached Celtic lands. Pre-

Christian Celtic designs contain symbols that were in the middle of Buddhist dharma wheels. Celtic knot work designs symbolize the interconnections of life in a way that reflects Buddhist theology. If Jesus had been exposed to Druidism as a youth, that exposure may have caused him to be receptive to Buddhism later.

When Christianity became established in England, Druidism vanished almost entirely. Some people think that happened because the Druids considered Jesus to be their Messiah "Yesu," and so they converted en masse. Oppression by Romans and Christians also contributed to Druidism's decline. Although Druids still exist today, their numbers are small, and England is predominantly Christian.

The English traditions about Christ fit the legends about him going to India. His Missing Years before and after age twelve gave him ample time to visit England with his great uncle, possibly attend Druidic schools, then journey later to Asia for years of study, followed by a return to Palestine at about age thirty.

The English legends about Christ's youth expand on a theme begun in the previous chapter. They suggest that Christ was a traveler who was keen to learn the religious ideas of other people. He may have traveled the roads and byways of the Roman Empire about as far as any person could, from the English Channel all the way to Asia. It was a journey that almost any youth with a questing spirit would have eagerly made, and his family circumstances allowed him to do so. What he learned during his travels may have inspired him to become a preacher in Palestine, or if he was groomed since childhood to take on the role of Messiah, his broad education and understanding of religion may have helped him to craft a message that people would respond to. The enormous impact that Jesus had on the world may have been, at least in part, the result of him being one of the most widely-educated men of his day in matters of theology.

Portraits

Spago's delicious entrees were followed by a smooth raspberry parfait and aromatic Colombian coffee. The chatter was lively, but for the older executives in the group, the hour of ten p.m. prompted graceful exits.

"Well, Joe," Orion inquired as they waited for the valet to bring the car, "did you enjoy dinner?"

"There were many delightful people in the group, and I enjoyed their creative spirit."

"Joe," Serena turned to him, "why don't you stay at our house tonight? A hotel is so impersonal, and we have two guest rooms. It's quiet and you'll sleep like a baby."

"Thank you for the invitation," Joe replied, "but I have been a nonstop presence in your husband's life all day, and I am sure that he would appreciate time alone with you. I also need to continue my planning for next week."

Orion was gripped with unease. *Exactly what is going to happen next week?* Joe never really explained.

They arrived at the posh Beverly Hills Hotel where a beautiful suite had been reserved by GTA. A small travel bag was already in the room when they entered.

"This is perfect!" Serena gushed. "Don't be shy about using room service. Just pick up the phone and dial '0' if you get hungry or need anything. And, here, I'll write down our home phone number. Call at any hour if you need us."

"The streets can be dangerous late at night," Orion cautioned. "And remember: you don't look anything like Jesus Christ."

Joe gave Orion a puzzled look. "How do people know what I looked like?"

"Well, good Lord!" Orion protested. "There are millions of pictures all over the world. Probably everyone on Earth has seen at least one."

"Who painted the pictures?"

"Well, I don't know exactly. Name a famous classical painter, and he's probably done a portrait."

"Where did the artists get my description?"

"From the Bible, I suppose."

"It is not in there."

Orion looked at Serena, who responded with a don't-ask-me shrug. She glanced at Joe who flashed back a playful smile to let her know that he was playing a game with her husband.

"So," Orion ventured, "what *did* you look like?"

Chapter 14

Jesus: The Black Man

"Christ wasn't white. Christ was a black man."[1]
Malcolm X in a 1963 interview.

In December 1994, *Life* magazine published an article entitled, "Who Was He? Solving the Mystery of Jesus and Why It Matters Today."[2] The article featured a picture gallery of Christ as envisioned by artists worldwide. Korea, China, and Japan give us Jesus with an Asian face. European art portrays him as Caucasian. In Hungary he has red hair and pale white skin. African-American and West African artists show him as black. Perhaps it is true that many people like to see Christ as a reflection of themselves.

The New Testament contains no physical description of Jesus other than he was a male in his early 30's when he preached. For this reason, speculation about his appearance has been a popular pastime. *Popular Mechanics* magazine joined the quest with its December 2002 cover story, "The Real Face of Jesus; Forensic Science Reveals The True Image of Jesus."

At last! Mystery solved!

Open the magazine, and…

Whoops. Staring from page 69 is a bearded man with closely cropped hair and typical first-century Mediterranean features. Nothing in his appearance is based on actual writings about Christ other than his general age, an assumption that he was muscular and weather-worn because he was a carpenter, that he was Jewish, and a statement made by Paul in *1 Corinthians* that long hair on a man is disgraceful.

Back to the drawing board.

Some early Christian writers made assumptions about Christ's appearance based on Old Testament prophecies. For example, some believed that he was the Suffering Servant predicted in *Isaiah,* and so he must have been ugly because the Suffering Servant was ugly. (See Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-*c.*165, *Dialogue with Tryppho),* Tertullian (*c.* 160-*c.* 220), Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 200), Origen (*c.*185-*c.*254) and Clement of Alexandria (*c.*150-*c.*215)). Other theo-

logians took the opposite view by saying that Jesus must have been extremely handsome based on *Psalms* 45:3-4 which predicted that the Messiah would be the best looking of men. (See Jerome (*c.*342-420, *in Mattheum, IX),* Basil (*c.*330-379), Chrysostom (*c.*347-407), and St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430).) Byzantine preachers (*c.*A.D. 400-1400's) taught that Christ was lame in the right leg. In the fifth century, Epiphanius noted stories that would put Jesus at six feet in height. Other estimates have Christ standing at five feet one inch, five feet five inches, and five feet seven inches.

As we will see in the next chapter, there are some apocryphal works that purport to contain eyewitness descriptions of Jesus, but they are widely regarded as spurious. The famous Shroud of Turin is believed by many to be the burial cloth of Christ, and it seems to contain his imprinted image formed by contact with the body. However, a carbon-14 test raised serious questions about the Shroud's authenticity. Irenaeus and St. Augustine both stated that Jesus' physical characteristics are unknown.

Did any of Christ's contemporaries paint or draw his portrait? Jews did not make images of their prophets because doing so would have been idolatrous. Instead, the earliest Christians used symbols and emblems to represent Christ, the most common being a fish, lamb, or the monogram "XP," all of which are still used today. As far as archaeologists can determine, Christian artists did not create physical images of Christ until decades, or even a century or more, after his crucifixion. Stories exist of portraits made during or immediately after his lifetime, but they are dubious:

1. The late fourth-century work *Doctrine of Addai* discusses the alleged correspondence between Jesus and Agbar. (See chapter 3). According to *Addai*, Agbar's messenger Hanan was an artist who painted a portrait of Jesus when they met, and he took his artwork to Agbar with Christ's letter. Several centuries later, Greek theologian John of Damascus (*c.*675-749) altered the Agbar legend by saying that Hanan was unable to paint the portrait when he looked at Christ, so Jesus placed a cloth (possibly measuring three meters long and two meters wide, or larger) over himself, and this created a lifelike image in the cloth. Jesus told Hanan to take the cloth back to Agbar. This cloth has been dubbed the "cloth of Edessa" which author Ian Wilson *(The Blood and the Shroud)* suggests may be the same cloth known today as the Shroud of Turin, although Wilson does not believe in the magical origin of the cloth.

2. According to another legend, Luke (author of the New Testament gospel) painted a portrait of mother Mary. He also started one of Christ that was miraculously completed by angels. No reproductions of this painting are known to exist.

3. A similar miracle supposedly happened to Nicodemus—a man who tended to Jesus' body after the crucifixion. When Nicodemus tried to sculpt a crucifix from memory, he woke up to find it completed with Jesus' head carved on it.

4. Apostle Peter was said to have painted a portrait of Jesus on a handkerchief using ink and stylus. This image was later copied onto other cloths to cover the faces of Christian martyrs during the persecution under Emperor Nero. None of these martyr cloths are known to exist today.

5. Other supposedly authentic portraits are said to have once existed, but they did not survive. A good summary is found on the website www.thenazareneway.com.

Artists usually portray Jesus with a beard, but this was based on the assumption that he was a Jewish rabbi, and such men typically allowed their facial hair to grow pursuant to Jewish law. The truth is, Jesus may have been clean-shaven. During the first few centuries A.D., early Christian artists with a Hellenistic background usually depicted Christ as a youthful man without facial hair, although a few bearded examples from that era exist. The bearded Christ did not become popular until later.

Most historians believe that Jesus was probably blessed with Mediterranean features, namely, light brown skin with dark hair. Gospels authors would have remarked on Christ's appearance only if there had been something unusual or noteworthy about it, so the lack of a description is evidence that his features were typical for the region. On the other hand, very few people in the Bible are physically described.

Does Jesus' family background tell us anything about how he looked? *Matthew* and *Luke* discuss his lineage, but they only tell us that Mary wed a man named Joseph. Joseph was reportedly a descendant of King David (*Luke* 2:4), but *Matthew* and *Luke* say that he was not Jesus' biological father; instead, an angel had impreg-

nated Mary. No mention is made of the ethnic seed used by that angel.

Skeptics of the virgin birth story generally assume that Joseph was Christ's biological father. *Matthew* 1:25 seems to confirm that he had sexual relations with Mary, albeit after Christ's birth: "...but he [*i.e.,* Joseph] had no marital relations with her *until* she had borne a son...." (NRSV, emphasis added). Jesus was Mary's firstborn child, not the only born. (*Luke* 2:7). *Matthew* 13:55 and *Luke* 6:3 add that Christ had four brothers and an unstated number of sisters. Some or all of them may have been Joseph's children from a previous marriage, or they were born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus*. The Bible contains no physical description of them.

Why do the New Testament gospels insist that Jesus had a virgin birth? God or God's Messiah could presumably enter any normally-conceived human body. One answer may be that the author of *Matthew* wanted Christ to fit another Old Testament prediction. *Matthew* 1:23 seems to be citing *Isaiah* 7:14-25 which declared that a person called "Immanuel" would be born of a virgin. This prediction, however, does not appear to have anything to do with Jesus: it concerned a person and political situation centuries before Christ. *Isaiah* 8:3 says that Immanuel (who is later apparently called Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz) had already been born during that earlier time. When *Isaiah* 9:1-7 later makes a Messianic prediction involving Galilee, there is no mention of a virgin birth. In fact, except for the disputed passage about Immanuel, no Old Testament books mention a virgin birth in connection with the predicted Messiah.

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* *Mark* 6:3 identifies the brothers as James (who became a church leader after Christ's death), Joseph (a.k.a Joses or Justus), Judas (not the one who betrayed Jesus) and Simon (not the apostle of that name). Apocryphal legends give his two sisters different names. *The Story of Joseph the Carpenter* (*c.*A.D. 400, Egypt) calls them Assia and Lydia. Epiphanius says they were Mary and Salome. Other sources give other names. The Catholic Church clings to the tenet that Mary was a "perpetual virgin" for her entire life and had no other children than Jesus. In the apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of James,* Joseph was an elderly carpenter who initially objected to being wed to Mary because of his age and the fact that he already had sons.

Was the virgin birth a real but misunderstood natural phenomenon? Virgin births, though rare, have been known to occur in some animal species, and it is conceivable that it happened to Mary if she was born with both X and Y chromosomes.

Many people believe that the virgin birth was invented to hide the fact that Jesus was an illegitimate child. According to the New Testament, when father Joseph discovered his wife to be pregnant, that is exactly what he suspected.

The illegitimacy idea was echoed in the Talmud which contains Jewish attitudes about Jesus from as early as *c.*A.D. 70. According to one Talmudic account, Christ's mother "Miriam" was a hairdresser who was married to a carpenter named Poppas. She had an affair with a Roman soldier named Tiberius Julius Abdes Panther(e) (a.k.a. "Pandera") that resulted in Jesus' conception. Pandera was born in Lebanon, but a grave site with his name can still be seen today in Bingerbrück, Germany. The story of Pandera and Mary spread widely, along with a number of variations such as a claim that Pandera was the father of Joseph, *i.e.,* Mary was impregnated by her own father-in-law. An even worse rumor had circulated two centuries earlier in third-century Alexandria: Mary had an affair with her own brother, and so Christ was conceived from incest. These rumors were enough to discredit all claims that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, and that was probably their purpose.

A different theory of the virgin birth is found in the book *Rex Deus.* Authors Hopkins, *et. al.* say that the Jerusalem temple may have operated boarding schools for the children of important families who were descended from the tribe of Levi (*i.e.,* of Levitic descent). One of those children was Mary. This idea is supported by the apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of James* (a.k.a. *Protovangelion*, *c.*A.D. 150) which states that Mary was raised as a child in a Jewish temple. *Rex Deus* suggests that the high priests were named after angels, archangels (*i.e.,* angels that are leaders of other angels), and important Jewish figures. Not only were those priests responsible for the children's education, they may have had a duty to impregnate the girls when they reached childbearing age so that the priestly bloodlines would remain pure. The girls would then be married off to Jewish husbands of high birth. *Rex Deus* theorizes that a high priest

named Gabriel impregnated Mary, whereupon she was wed to a wealthy young (not old) man named Joseph who was descended from Hiram Abif of Masonic legend.

As we have seen, there are a variety of stories, rumors, and theories about Christ's ancestry, but there is nothing in them to conclusively prove his ethnicity. This leaves us free to ask if Jesus was indeed a black man.

The Black Christ theory often begins with the Old Testament. According to *Genesis,* God destroyed the human race with a Great Flood. The only human survivors were Noah and his family who reseeded *Homo sapiens* after the waters receded. The story implies that every person on Earth today is descended from Noah and his immediate descendants. (See *Genesis* 9:18).

Noah had three sons named Shem, Ham and Japheth. "Ham" means "hot," "heat," or "black," and some people believe that Ham was a black man. Ham, in turn, gave birth to four sons including Cush after whom the the upper Nile region south of Egypt was named. This would mean that Cush was the originator of the Ethiopian and Nubian people who have dark black skin. When the Old Testament mentions "Cushites," it is probably referring to those dark-skinned people. All of this leads to a logical argument: if a son and grandson of Noah were black, then should we not assume that Noah and *all* of his family were black? This is an interesting question in light of the belief held by many anthropologists that the earliest seeds of modern *Homo sapiens* lie in Africa.

The Old Testament says that Judaism was first introduced to a tribe that lived in a region called Ur—an area settled by Cushites and others. Is it possible that the first Jews were a tribe of Cushites? Probably not. *2 Samuel* 18:21-22 clearly indicates that the Cushites were not the same as the earliest Jews. Another Old Testament verse says, "Are not you and the Cushites all the same to me, children of Israel?—declares Yahweh." (*Amos* 9:7, NJB). This *Amos* passage is commonly interpreted to mean that Cushites were included among God's chosen people, but they were distinct from the Jewish group being addressed.

Even if the first Israelites were not Cushites, they probably intermixed with black people during their four centuries of slavery in Egypt that began *c.*1900-1800 B.C. Egypt at that time was racially diverse. In its ruins are pictures of people with a wide variety of features. Some are "Mediterranean," others can almost be described as "Caucasian androgynous," some are Ethiopian (*i.e.,* East African black), and others are West African black including several pharaohs and others of high rank. An Oxford study of Egyptian skeletal remains indicates that at least 20% of all Egyptian males and 15% of all females were black (or of mixed race) at the time the Hebrew tribes were there.[4]

Egypt depended heavily on slaves for its labor force, and many slaves were Nubians (*i.e.,* West African blacks). Some scholars believe that Hebrew, Nubian, and Ethiopian slaves intermarried and, after four centuries, a great deal of black blood had entered the Jewish gene pool. *Exodus* 12:38 confirms that the 600,000 Israelites who fled Egypt during the Exodus were of "mixed ancestry." *Numbers* 12:1 reveals that the great prophet Moses who led the Exodus was married to a Cushite, *i.e.,* presumably to an Ethiopian or black woman. Some theorists argue that Moses would only have married a Cushite if he was one himself.

Not everyone agrees that "Cushite" means "black." It has been proposed that it merely refers to any person who came from the Middle Eastern region of Midian. *Exodus* 2:15-22 reports that Moses had once fled to Midian where he met his Cushite wife.

As it turns out, there are many black Jews today, and some of them living in Israel made their presence well-known to the world in January 1996 when they staged large-scale protests because their blood donations were being secretly discarded for fear of HIV infection. The protesters were Ethiopian Jews who had migrated to Israel and are recognized as full members of the faith by their lighter-skinned brethren. Ethiopian Jews traditionally trace their origins to King Solomon who had married the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba—presumably a black-skinned woman—*c.*900 B.C. The marriage resulted in a son, Menilek I, who perpetuated the Jewish monarchy in Ethiopia. The official tongue of Ethiopia is Amharic which is a Semitic language—the same language group as Hebrew.

The link between Judaism and Africa extends further south to the Venda region of South Africa. The township of Soweto is populated by a group of hard-working black people known as Lembas who claim to be the descendants of a Lost Tribe of Israel. The

Lembas follow Jewish practices, and a geneticist in Johannesburg released a study that seems to reveal important genetic similarities between some Lemba males and Jews in Yemen. Other scientists dispute these findings, but the Lembas remain adamant about their Jewish origins.

According to Ethiopian and Lemban traditions, Judaism in Africa did not arise until long after it was founded in Mesopotamia, and so most Ethiopians and Lembans do not say that their ancestors were the first Jews. It is nevertheless clear that black people had become significant in Judaism long before Christ. Was he one of them?

Some early depictions of Jesus and his mother seem to show them as black-skinned:

A gold coin issued by Christian emperor Justinian II (*c.*669-711 A.D.) depicts Justinian on one side with long straight hair, and Jesus on the reverse with tight curly locks and a high forehead common to many Ethiopian men. The *Cambridge Encyclopedia* cites this as proof of a widespread belief in the eighth century that Jesus was a black man.

More than a millennium ago in Europe, images were created and adored that are today called the "Black Madonna" and "Black Christ." More than 450 Black Madonna images are found throughout Europe. In France alone, over 190 were venerated in the 16th century, although the majority were destroyed several hundred years later during the French Revolution. Even the Italian Church had depictions of a black infant in his mother's arms. Are they images of Mary and Jesus? Actually, we cannot be sure. At the cathedral in Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer there is a statue that looks like a Black Madonna, but it is said to be "Sara the Egyptian." As we will see in chapter 18, there are non-Biblical traditions that a group of Christ's followers sailed to France after the crucifixion, and one of them was a servant named Sara who is generally presumed to be black. The "Black Madonna" and "Black Christ" images may actually be based on her and her child. Another theory is that the Black Madonnas are images of the Egyptian goddess Isis and her baby Horus that were brought to Europe by the Knights Templar *c.*1100-1300 and were later wrongly identified as Mary and Jesus.

The earliest known portraits of Jesus are in the Roman catacombs where Christians buried their dead. Catacombs became popular with Christians by the second-century A.D. and were used for at least two hundred years. In one of them, a wall painting of Christ shows him in profile with long slightly wavy hair, beard, large nose, large eyes, and pale skin. These features might be considered "Mediterranean" or "European," but they are not black. Another candidate for "Earliest Known Picture of Christ" is also found in the catacombs, and although the image has been largely obliterated, what remains is the Greco-Roman image of a man with long dark hair and light skin: again, not the image of a black man. On the other hand, a late third-century catacomb painting shows Jesus performing a miracle, and his skin is arguably dark enough to be considered black with curly hair, but this picture was drawn long after the other two.

A mistaken claim has been made that Jesus was usually portrayed as black in Europe until Pope Julius II commissioned Michaelangelo in 1505 to paint Bible scenes, and that was the beginning of the "White God" and "White Christ" images. A quick survey of European art reveals that Jesus was commonly portrayed as a Caucasian well before 1505, especially in Italy. This is evidenced by the catacomb paintings mentioned above and Italian religious art from the 14th century.

Even if the Black Christ Theory is not strong, the fact that there is any evidence at all provides us with an important moral. Common assumptions are not necessarily correct, and it is important to look behind them. Doing so can often lead down fascinating paths to unexpected truths.

Busted

Orion and Serena awoke to a balmy Friday morning. This last day of the work week gave them a happy sense of closure and a weekend to look forward to.

As the agent maneuvered his Rolls through morning traffic to pick up Joe at the hotel, he pondered his schedule for the day. They would ink a contract, discuss a preliminary publicity plan with Brenda, and then take lunch at Bernie's to option some movie rights.

(Beep! Beep! Beep!)

Orion pressed the cell phone to his ear. It was Sandy.

"We have trouble, boss," she reported. "You're needed at County jail."

"Oh, for Pete's sake! Did the Tonic Girls trash the Hilton again?"

"No. It's our Mr. Christ. He got into trouble last night. He needs bail money."

"What?!" Orion exclaimed as he turned the steering wheel to change direction. "Why did I know something like this might happen? I'm on my way. Any other calls?"

"I'll say. There's a rumor about Joe, and it's making people go nuts. Word is out that we have him. Somebody from CNN is hysterical and is sending a news team over right now. French national TV wants you to call right away: they said they already have a documentary crew in the air. The National Council of Churches wants their rep to meet Joe tonight. Then there was a message that I could hardly understand, but I think it was some Papal guy from the Vatican. Do you want me to set appointments?"

"No. I'd better find out why he's in the slammer. Be a dear and keeping taking messages, would you?"

At Los Angeles County Jail, Orion found a window to pay the $500.00 bail.

"What's he in for?" he asked as he counted out the cash.

"Soliciting prostitution, misdemeanor," the clerk replied without the slightest hint of interest. "Looks like he got stung by a police decoy off Sunset Strip."

So our boy has shown his true colors, Orion thought in resignation. *We were all fooled by a sex addict with a pretty face. That means it's time for Plan B: Bail him out, box his belongings, and send him on the next flight to New York.*

A corrections officer escorted Orion to a holding cell. "Your pal's been a royal pain. We're glad to get him off our hands."

When they reached the cell, Orion was startled to see Joe huddled in a circle with five other inmates who had their arms around each other. The brute of a man next to Joe was heaving deep sobs while the others rocked gently back and forth. Joe caressed the crying man's shoulder.

"See, what did I tell you?" the officer mumbled cynically to Orion, "He's been doing this crap all night. That guy he's hugging is in for armed home invasion."

The guard yelled to Joe, "Hey! Mr. Sensitive!"

Joe turned his head and gave the corrections officer a withering look.

"OK, OK," the guard backed off, "but your bail ticket is here. When you're done with the baby-sitting, you're free to go."

Joe turned his gaze to Orion and nodded as though to say, *I'll be done in a few minutes.*

Orion gestured back, *take your time.*

The sobbing stopped after ten minutes, but the men clung to their embrace for another five. As they slowly separated, Orion could see that they were a racially diverse group. The sobbing giant was a muscular black man who had some hard living etched in his face.

"You're my brother," the giant said to Joe, "even if you're a white man."

"We are all brothers," Joe replied. "Beneath our skin, we are all souls struggling to find our way."

The other prisoners gave Joe a "high-five" as he walked out of the cell.

Joe was resurrected in Orion's eyes.

"You have a lot of explaining to do," Orion halfheartedly chided him as they walked to the car. "You just cost me half a grand. That guy you were cuddling could have snapped your neck if you so much as blinked at him the wrong way."

"He is a noble soul who has strayed, but he will redeem himself," Joe replied with confidence.

"Not to change the subject, but what happened last night? How did you wind up in the slammer?"

"Television was not very interesting," Joe explained, "so I walked down Sunset Boulevard. A woman approached and asked if I desired her company. I was pleased to accept. As soon as I did, two men ran to us and placed handcuffs on me. They said that I had solicited prostitution."

"Didn't you know that she was a police decoy acting as a hooker?"

"I was not looking for her services. She was anxious, hurried, and not at peace. I wanted to help. I had only a few coins in my pocket."

Orion studied Joe's face. There was no hint of deceit.

"It's a clear case of entrapment," the agent declared. "Decoys like her are always wired for sound, so it will be real obvious what happened. When you were booked, the jail record will show that you only had a few cents and could not have been in the market for a hooker. We'll get you the best lawyer in town and beat this one. Don't worry."

"I am not concerned," Joe replied, "but I appreciate your demonstration of support."

"By the way, the husky guy in your jail cell said that you're white. To be honest, I wasn't sure about your ethnic background."

"Then maybe I should keep you guessing," Joe laughed.

Chapter 15

Jesus: The Redhead

Was Jesus a light-skinned Caucasian as he is so frequently portrayed? Is it possible that his ancestry was European instead of Middle Eastern?

The English College of Arms has had a curious document labeled Roll 33, Box 26. It purports to be a pedigree of Christ tracing his lineage all the way back to Adam. According to the Roll, his maternal grandmother Anne was of royal Cornish blood, *i.e.,* his maternal lineage lay in the British Isles.

Anne had three husbands, the first being Joachim. According to some British traditions, Anne and Joachim were married in Cornwall where they conceived Jesus' mother Mary. One legend declares that Joachim was a brutal man, so his wife fled their home while she was pregnant. She wound up in the Middle East where their daughter Mary was born and raised.*

Further allusions to Christ's British heritage are found in the Jesus College where a document states that Mary's sister Penardin married King Lear of England. Ancient Welsh bards** waxed

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* The apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of James* (a.k.a. *Protovangelion, c.*A.D. 150) tells a different story. It mentions the nuptials between Anne and Joachim but places them in Israel instead of England. Joachim possessed great wealth and donated generously to the temple; however, his wife was unable to conceive a child until an angel caused her to become pregnant. Joachim was present for the birth. Although *Protovangelion* contradicts the English tradition in some ways, they can be reconciled by speculating that Joachim followed Anne from England to the Middle East where their child was born. Joachim's wealth may have come from England, and he may have returned to the Isles sometime after the birth of Mary, perhaps resulting in a long period of separation from his wife. English legend says that Anne returned to England after their daughter got married at the age of fifteen only to discover that Joachim had died.

** Bards were poets and singers who sang about famous people and heroic deeds. The ancient bards of England and Wales passed along much of England's history until the information was finally written down.

poetic about the many saints and princes of England who also traced their family trees to Mary's side of the family. St. David—uncle of King Arthur (*d.*A.D. 537)—claimed a pedigree in Mary's nephew Eugeuen. King Arthur and his famous Knights of the Round Table were said to be descendants of Joseph of Arimathea, who has been cited as Mary's uncle. A Cornish Christ might help explain a description of Christ reported by Epiphanius in the 5th century: six feet tall, a complexion like ripe wheat (*i.e.,* light tan), long nose, coal-black eyebrows, and some red in his hair. The average height of Jewish men in first century Jerusalem was not much over five feet, and red hair was far more common to British lands than the Mediterranean.

An apocryphal work titled *Letter of Pubulus Lentulus* contains a description of Christ that is similar to Epiphanius and even to the image in the Shroud of Turin:

> At this time, there hath appeared, and still lives, a man endued with great powers, whose name is Jesus Christ. Men say that he is a mighty prophet; his disciples call him the Son of God. He restores the dead to life, and heals the sick from all sorts of ailments and diseases. He is a man of stature, proportionately tall, and his cast of countenance has a certain severity in it, so full of effect, as to induce beholders to love, and yet still to fear him. His hair is of the colour of wine [*i.e.,* probably red], as far as to the bottom of his ears, without radiation, and straight; and from the lower part of his ears, it is curled, down to his shoulders, and bright, and hangs downwards from his shoulders; at the top of his head it is parted after the fashion of the Nazarines. His forehead is smooth and clean, and his face without a pimple, adorned by a certain temperate redness; his countenance gentlemanlike and agreeable, his nose and mouth nothing amiss; his beard thick, and divided into two bunches, of the same colour as his hair; his eyes blue, and uncommonly bright. In reproving and rebuking he is formidable; in teaching and exhorting, of a bland and agreeable tongue. He has a wonderful grace of person united with seriousness. No one hath ever seen him smile, but weeping indeed they have. He hath a lengthened stature of body; his hands are straight and turned up, his arms are delectable; in speaking, deliberate and slow, and sparing of his conversations;—the most beautiful of countenance among the sons of men.[1*]

The redness of Christ's complexion could mean that he had naturally pale skin that sunburned but did not tan easily—a trait common to many redheads. Jesus' attractive forehead was also noted in the Buddhist documents reported by Swami Abhedananda. (See chapter 12.)

Lentulus was first published in the 15th century, and it is almost certainly a forgery because it uses the name "Jesus Christ." However, it seems to be based on earlier traditions...perhaps a combination of Epiphanius and the Turin Shroud? Artists before *Lentulus* were already portraying Christ with red hair, especially in Italian manuscript illuminations and altar paintings.

Students of Christology will inevitably encounter theories that Jesus was an Aryan Gentile. The word "Aryan" has been widely misused as a racial classification to mean Caucasians of European ancestry. Properly used, the word is only a linguistic label for people who speak the Indo-European languages such as Celtic, Sanskrit, the Slavic tongues, Indo-Iranian, and the major European languages including English. Aryans include the lighter-skinned peoples of Europe, but they also encompass people of the Middle East and others of darker complexion. In fact, by its correct definition, an Aryan is any person whose native tongue is one of the Indo-European languages, including an African-American born in the United States or Europe who can properly be called a "black Aryan." The word "Aryan" also has nothing to do with religion, and therefore any Jew born and raised within the Indo-European languages can be labeled an "Aryan Jew." The bottom line is that "Aryan" is a meaningless term to describe people today, but it still has some limited value when studying first-century history.

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* Different translations of this letter have been published in other works, including one that gives Jesus auburn (reddish-brown) hair with an unusual sheen, and another with brown hair alone. Two of those translations are reproduced in footnote 1. A somewhat similar description of Christ is found in the apocryphal *Archko* Volume. (See footnote 1.)

The term "Aryan" was first used in its Sanskrit form ("Arya") in the Veda—a religious book of ancient India. At that time, Aryans were the lighter-skinned invaders from the west who conquered India and established the caste system there. They spoke the Indo-European language of Sanskrit.

In contrast to Aryans are "Semites." The term refers to those people who speak the "Semitic" languages such as Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Phoenician, and Assyrian. Properly used, "Semite" also has nothing to do with race or religion, but because Semites originally came from a certain part of the world, many early Semites shared some ethnic features in common as did early Aryans. Like the Semites, early Aryans developed some of their own cultures and religions. Many of them also embraced the usual conceit that they were specially favored by God or gods over other people just as Jews do in the Jewish Scriptures, Christians do in the New Testament, Muslims do in the Koran, and other religions do in their texts.

As noted in chapter 12, one Aryan religion was caste-based Hinduism. In order for a person to be educated by the Brahman priests, he had to be an Aryan. If Jesus was initially welcomed by those priests as discussed in chapter 12, then it becomes our first clue that he or his parents may have been Aryans, not Semites.

Another important Aryan religion during Christ's time was Zoroastrianism. Its founder was Persian prophet Zoroaster (a.k.a., Zarathushtra) who probably lived somewhere between 1400 and 1200 B.C., although another tradition places him as late as 600 B.C. Zoroaster competes with Akhenaten for the title of "the world's first monotheist." He preached a single supreme God, heaven and hell, the coming of a savior sent by God, physical resurrection of the dead, and a Final Judgment. Many historians believe that Zoroaster's teachings were the foundation for similar ideas in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Zoroastrians today teach that the supreme God (Ahura Mazda) is eternal and uncreated. All spiritual beings are the offspring of Ahura Mazda who also created the material universe and has used it to help bring about the destruction of his enemy: the evil spirit Angra Mainyu. People have a choice to either join the forces of good (Ahura Mazda) or evil (Angra Mainyu) in this battle, and this decision determines a person's fate after death. God will eventually destroy Angra Mainyu, and

righteous people can look forward to being reunited with their bodies in a better form*. The parallels to orthodox Christianity are unmistakable.

Zoroaster was an Aryan who preached in the southern plains of what is now the Commonwealth of Independent States where the Aryan peoples probably originated. The Zoroastrian bible is called the *Zend-Avesta,* and it speaks of God favoring the Aryan people over all others. After Zoroaster's lifetime, these teachings spread into Persia (now called Iran, which is a derivative of the word "Aryan"). Zoroastrianism became the Persian state religion and was still important when Jesus was born**.

Zoroastrian teachers may have directly influenced the formation of Christianity. *The NIV Study Bible* and *The Catholic Study Bible* concur that the magi who visited baby Jesus may have come from Persia. *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* informs us that these magi were a "caste of wise men, variously associated with interpretations of dreams, Zoroastrianism, astrology, and magic."[2] "Magi" came to have a broader definition by Jesus' lifetime to mean almost anyone who practiced astrology and magic, and so we cannot be certain that little Christ's visitors were Persian or Zoroastrian, but if they were, then they were seeking a Savior who fulfilled the predictions of the *Zend-Avesta.* Such a prophet had to be an Aryan, and in those days an Aryan would most likely have been a Gentile (non-Jew). According to Lewis' Rosicrucian legend discussed in chapter 9, "The record of His [*i.e.,* Jesus'] entrance into the [Essene] school at Carmel shows that he was entered as Joseph, the son of Mary and Joseph, and the reincarnation of *Zoroaster,* the

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* It is difficult to know which of these doctrines were truly taught by Zoroaster and which were added later since none of his pronouncements were recorded until sometime between A.D. 224 and 651, *i.e.,* 800 to 2,000 years after his death. Until then, Zoroaster's teachings were conveyed by word of mouth because they were considered too sacred to be written down. Conflicting versions of Zoroastrian beliefs can be found.

** Zoroastrianism waned with the rise of Islam in the 7th century. At the end of the ninth century, many Zoroastrians left Persia for India. Today, there are only about 150,000 practicing Zoroastrians worldwide, with the biggest community still residing in India.

'Son of God.'"[3] (Italics in the original). Lewis claims that Zoroastrian teachings were studied by the Essenes.

As made amply clear in the New Testament, Galilee was Jesus' primary home. A curious fact about Galilee is that both the Old and New Testaments say that it was a land of Gentiles. *1 Maccabees* 5:15 (NAB, NJB) calls it "gentile Galilee" and tells how a Jewish army marched into the region in 164 or 163 B.C., defeated the Gentile troops, and helped Jewish families there relocate to Judaea. Decades later, Gentiles in Galilee were forced to adopt the Jewish practice of circumcision and Mosaic law, but this did not change Galilee's character as a fundamentally non-Jewish region. *Matthew* 4:12-16 quotes *Isaiah* in a way to suggest that Galilee was still a land of Gentiles when Christ lived there.

The Zoroastrian and Galilee connections increase the odds that Jesus may have come from an Aryan Gentile background on his mother's side of the family. If she was raised in a Jewish temple and/or married to a Jewish man because her mother had moved to Palestine from England, then we may better understand how Jesus could have set foot in both the Jewish and Gentile camps. In other words, a handsome auburn-maned Messiah who preached to Jews and Gentiles alike is not out of the question.

Was Jesus a white-skinned European?

Was he a black man?

Was he neither?

Does it matter?

A person's racial makeup can be an interesting bit of trivia, but in Christ's case it only has value as one of the many clues that might tell us what he believed and taught. Beyond that, the question of his ethnic background is superficial. In the gospels, Jesus never mentions race, language, or skin color. His message was simple: "...anyone who comes to me I will never turn away." (*John* 6:37, REB). Jesus is never quoted as saying that ethnicity has any bearing on a person's spiritual status or that it affects salvation. He makes it clear that spiritual success depends upon what people do and say.

Perhaps it is good that Jesus' race is not mentioned in the Bible. It may help people to further appreciate that skin color is not really important after all.

Finding Partners

Time was limited before lunch with Bernie. Orion made a beeline from county jail to the Beverly Hills Hotel so that his companion could shower and change clothing.

At the hotel room, Orion made a quick call to Sandy while Joe showered.

"Bernie invited a couple of other people to lunch," Sandy informed him, "and he hopes you don't mind. Boss, this thing is spinning out of control. Now the White House religious advisor wants you to call. At least a dozen TV crews are camped on the sidewalk outside. And have you been listening to the news? Something strange is starting to happen in the Middle East. Somebody told me Joe might be connected to it."

"Sandy, he's flying back to New York tomorrow. Everybody's wasting their time trying to reach him now. Get their names and numbers. We'll contact them as soon as he's ready for a press conference."

"Did he sign up with us?"

"Not yet, and I'm still not sure what to make of it all. Maybe I should take him and just see where things go. Here he comes. Talk to you later. "

Joe emerged dressed in a clean change of clothing. Orion resisted an impulse to suggest that they swing by Nordstrom's to help him "dress for success." Instead, he asked his guest to stay longer in Los Angeles.

"I am enjoying my time here," Joe assured his host, "but my timetable requires that I return to New York as planned."

"Sandy mentioned that something unusual is happening in the Middle East. What is that all about?"

Joe laughed. "Just an outbreak of good sense, I would hope."

They arrived on time at Bernie's Malibu estate. The owner was a friendly hard-driving man in his late sixties whose greatest professional thrill was discovering and promoting new talent.

"Orie!" Bernie greeted the agent in the foyer. "So, this is the Mr. Christ that I've been hearing so much about."

Joe extended his hand in greeting. "Please call me Joe."

Bernie looked at him quizically.

"I'll explain later,"Orion assured him.

"Now, Joe," Bernie continued as they walked toward the veranda, "let me assure you of one thing. I am not a Christian, but I see no reason why people of all faiths cannot live together in harmony. You have never posed a threat to me as a Jew."

"Your attitude is commendable," Joe acknowledged.

"Orie," Bernie turned to the agent, "I took the liberty of inviting a couple of reps from World Unicom. They're here to buy me out. They happened to mention the rumors about our friend here, so I asked them over. Is that alright?"

Orion turned to Joe. "World Unicom is the biggest media conglomerate in the world. They're gobbling up everything in sight. They own enough media to put your face in every house and keep it there. Let me do the talking."

Despite his bravado, Orion was uneasy about Bernie's news.

"You're the last of the big independent studios," Orion said to his host. "Do you really want your baby swallowed by an octopus?"

"Friend, these old bones have had it. My biologist daughter isn't going to step in and run a movie company, so it's time for me to cash in. I've worked for it."

"You have indeed, old friend," Orion said as he gave Bernie a squeeze on the shoulder.

The World Unicom representatives were sipping drinks in the covered patio. They were staring at a small fountain and smiling with bemused pity—an expression they had learned to use with great effect to weaken the resistance of their takeover targets.

Bernie seated his new guests but wasted no time with small talk.

"Mr. Christ, er, I mean Joe," he began, "Orie Shaw is the best agent in the world. As for me, I reach millions of people with my pictures and TV shows. If these good gentlemen from World Unicom join us, you're looking at a team that can make your Second Coming the biggest media event in history. But before I take you under my wing, I need to know that you're ready to do what it takes."

"For example..?" Joe queried.

"Well, for starters, are you married? Do you have a wife or girlfriend?"

"Neither."

"That's what I'm talking about. That whole celibacy thing was good PR two thousand years ago, but this is a different world today. Abstinence isn't valued; it's considered cold, and you'll hurt yourself with it. Orie here can set you up with some eligible females, and Brenda will make sure that the paparazzi are there to snap your picture when you go on a date. Joe, what I'm saying is this: preaching isn't enough. You need a woman."

Chapter 16

Jesus: Husband and Father

History's Most Eligible Bachelor.

If such an award is ever bestowed, Jesus would be the hands-down winner...at least if common assumptions about him are correct.

Most Christians believe that Christ was a lifelong bachelor because the New Testament says nothing about a wife or children. His bachelorhood would make sense if he was an Essene since most Essene men did not marry. But the New Testament does not say that he was single. Did Christ enjoy a romantic life?

Luke 8:2-3 informs us that Jesus had many women followers. One of them was especially loyal, and she was known as Mary "the Magdalene" (or Magdalen). She looked after Jesus personally and was present at his crucifixion and burial. Magdalene was the first individual to whom Christ revealed himself after his resurrection.

In the apocrypha, Jesus' relationship with Magdalene was very close. The Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* says, "There were three who always walked with the lord [*i.e.,* Jesus]: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary."[1] In *Mary Magdalen*[2], Susan Haskins points out that the Greek word *koinonos* which is translated as "companion" actually means "partner" or "consort," *i.e.,* someone with whom a man has sexual relations. Later in the same gospel we read the following choppy fragment which hints further at romance:

> And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [...loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [...]. The rest of [the disciples...]. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?"[3]

Other Gnostic gospels elevate Magdalene to the status of full Apostle and leader. In *Gospel of Mary* (named after Magdalene), she speaks authoritatively about Christ's teachings when Apostle

Peter says to her, "Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than any other woman. Tell us the words of the Savior that you know, but which we haven't heard."[4] *Mary* further informs us that Jesus knew Magdalene "completely" and loved her devotedly. In *Dialogue of the Savior* (*c.*A.D. 150) and the *Gospel of Thomas* (*c.*A.D. 50-140), Mary sits with the Apostles as an equal while they ask Jesus questions. She is the only woman to do so.

What seems to be missing is an actual marriage ceremony. Were Jesus and Magdalene unmarried lovers? This is implied by the *Gospel of Philip* because it is unlikely that the Apostles would have objected to Christ's affection for her if she had been his spouse. They would not have commented that he loved her more than any other woman since that would be self-evident if they were husband and wife. If Jesus was an Essene and had failed to receive approval from his Elders for the nuptials, he might have entered into a cohabitation relationship.

On the other hand, a handful of writers believe that the New Testament gospels do mention Christ's marriage. *John* 2:1-11 tells of a wedding banquet in Cana, Galilee. Jesus, his brothers, the Apostles, and mother Mary were all there. When the wine ran low, Mary asked her son to remedy the problem, but Jesus objected. Mary ignored him and commanded the servants to follow her son's orders. He then performed his first public miracle by turning urns of water into wine. There are several aspects to this story that add up to Jesus being the bridegroom: (1) the bride and groom are not named in the story, (2) his mother seemed to be in command of the servants, (3) Jesus performed a task normally carried out by the groom–namely, providing guests with drink, and (4) the master of ceremonies complimented the unnamed groom on the quality of the wine which was Christ's doing.

On the other hand, not everything in the Cana story points to Jesus as the groom. He initially objected to providing the wine, and this would indicate that he had no responsibility to do so. Perhaps his mother was simply trying to assist the host by urging her son to be helpful. The master of ceremonies did not know where the wine had come from, and this means that he probably did not offer his compliments to Jesus.

Even if Christ was not the groom at Cana, he could have tied the knot with Magdalene at some other time. As *John* points out, most details of Christ's life are not on record.

Who was this woman called Magdalene?

Luke 8:2 says that she was a person "from whom seven demons had come out..." (NIV). In other words, she was someone that Jesus had cured of a serious spiritual or mental disorder. Christian traditions say that she was a prostitute, and this is the common image of her today. The Hebrew word *magdalah* means "harlot," and this may be the origin of her title "the Magdalene."* If she had been a prostitute, then that would be reason enough for orthodox Christians to downplay a romance with Christ: the scandal would have made it difficult to promote Jesus as the Jewish Savior.

Was Magdalene really a harlot?

Pope Gregory the Great (*c.*540-604 A.D.) certainly intimated so when he declared her to be the unnamed "sinful woman" of *Luke* 7:37-50. Gregory also said that Magdelene was the woman called "Mary of Bethany" later in the gospels. His conclusions, however, have been called into question. *Luke's* Sinful Woman makes her appearance in the chapter before Magdalene is introduced, and *Luke's* introduction of Magdalene strongly suggests that she is being discussed for the first time. This would indicate two different women. As for Mary of Bethany, she was a person of apparent wealth who had anointed (oiled) Jesus' feet. (See *Matthew* 26:6-13, *Mark* 14:3-9, and *John* 12:3). Because the Sinful Woman had also anointed Christ's feet, many assume that she and Mary of Bethany were the same person. This is doubtful because the episode of *Luke's* Sinful Woman happened earlier than the episode of Mary of Bethany, and therefore *Luke* would have called the Sinful Woman "Mary of Bethany." Jesus probably had his feet anointed by different people at different times. (He did plenty of walking and would no doubt have welcomed getting his feet massaged.) The better

* Many people believe that she was named after her hometown of Magdala which was a small fishing center on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The name "Magdalen" may also have come from a Talmudic expression that means "curling women's hair"—an expression used to identify an adulteress.

scholarship is that Magdalene, *Luke*'s Sinful Woman, and Mary of Bethany were three different people, which leaves Magdalene's background uncertain.

If Jesus was romantically active, did he have children?

The official and apocryphal gospels are silent on this question, which is commonly interpreted to mean that he did not. But if Christ's inner circle had hidden the fact of his marriage, they would have also stayed mum about any offspring, perhaps to protect them. As discussed in chapter 7, any claim by Jesus or his followers that he was the Messiah from the House of David made him a political threat to the ruling House of Herod and the Romans. His children, especially sons, would be next in succession to Jesus, and so they had the potential to pose the same political threat as their father. The best way to protect Christ's children during the decades after the crucifixion was to pretend that they never existed.

A related theory suggests that the Roman Church hid the fact of Christ's children because they or their descendants could gain political power and use it against the Church. Jesus therefore became a "perpetual virgin" like his mother to prevent anyone from claiming kinship (or kingship) on the basis of Biblical authority.

Is there any affirmative evidence that Jesus had children?

In the story of Christ's trial and crucifixion, all four gospels mention a Roman prisoner named Barabbas. (*Matthew* 27:16-26, *Mark* 15:6-15, *Luke* 23:13-25, and *John* 18:39-40). Pilate told a crowd that he would release either Jesus or Barabbas in accordance with the custom of freeing a single Jewish prisoner at Passover. The crowd chose Barabbas, and so Jesus went to the cross.

Who was Barabbas? Was he the middle-aged homicidal goofball portrayed in Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ?*

Barabbas was one of the "insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising." (*Mark* 15:7, NIV). In other words, he was in prison on charges similar to those leveled at Christ, although Jesus had not been accused of murder. What many people do not know is that early gospel manuscripts called Barabbas *bar'Abba-*, which means "son of the father." According to early Christian tradition, Barabbas was known as "Jesus bar'Abba-" which can be interpreted as, "Jesus, son of the Father [Jesus]," *i.e.*, "Jesus, Jr."

Barabbas may have been Christ's son.

This theory is strengthened by an apocryphal writing called the *Gospel of the Nazoreans* (a.k.a. *Gospel of the Hebrews*). This gospel no longer exists in its original form but is briefly quoted by three early Christian writers. *Nazoreans* was probably written during the first half of the second century, and Jerome makes the following comment about it:

> In the so-called Gospel of the Hebrews the name of the man who was to be condemned for sedition and murder [*i.e.*, Barabbas] is interpreted as "son of their teacher." [5]

Son of *whose* teacher? We cannot be certain, but the reference might be to Christ's followers, so Barabbas could once again mean "son of Jesus."

A number of commentators have suggested that Jesus bar-Abbas was another man named Jesus who was also claiming to be the son of God, *i.e.*, "son of the Father." In other words, the Romans had two competing Jesus Christs and were intent on crucifying one of them. This interpretation postulates too much of a coincidence for some people, and if it were true, then one would expect more commentary about it in the gospels or apocrypha. The "Jesus, Jr." theory seems to fit the gospel evidence better.

If Christ was in his early-to-mid thirties when he went to trial, he was old enough to have an adolescent or young adult child. Marriage in Christ's day often occurred in the teens, *i.e.*, about the time the body reached sexual maturity. If that had been true of Jesus and he had sired a boy, his son would have been in his late teens by the time of the crucifixion. That was old enough to join a group of insurrectionists, and to be arrested and executed for it. That makes it possible for Barabbas to have been both Christ's child and a political prisoner of the Romans.

Barabbas catches our attention for another reason. As the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* points out, "There is no extrabiblical evidence for the annual custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover."[6] *Jerome* adds, "Also disputed is whether the Barabbas incident and the supposed custom underlying it are historical or the creation of Christian tradition."[7] In other words, some people doubt the very existence of Barabbas because there was no known "custom" of releasing a Jewish prisoner at Passover as the New Testament claims, yet the Barabbas story cuts across all four gospels. Why would all of the gospel authors invent a phony custom like that?

Perhaps they did so to disguise the true reason for Barabbas' release: Pilate had Christ's son in custody and was using him as a bargaining chip to coerce Jesus into a voluntary surrender. Jesus may have yielded to a horrible Roman ultimatum: "Surrender, and we'll release your kid. If you don't, your kid dies." This might explain the riddle of why Jesus did not flee after the Last Supper when he knew that his arrest was imminent, even though he had fled to Galilee on prior occasions when faced with danger. Christ's weak and ineffectual defense at trial and the offhand attitudes of Herod and Pilate suggest that the trial was a charade—the deal had already been made. Jesus allowed himself to be arrested, and his son was released as promised.

If Barabbas was Christ's son, then it means that Jesus had a child with someone other than Mary Magdalene, or he had met (and possibly wed) Magdalene as a teenager during his Missing Years. The gospels do not tell us when Christ and Magdalene first became acquainted. She is simply introduced as a member of his entourage early in the ministry.

Is it possible that Jesus also had a daughter? The town of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in France holds a festival that commemorates the arrival of Christ's daughter and her mother Mary Magdalene after the crucifixion. As we will see in chapter 18, there are popular traditions that Magdalene went to France and lived out the remainder of her life there. Jesus could have fathered a son in his teens and then a daughter shortly before his crucifixion.

The idea that Jesus fathered one or more children has been popularized in a variety of modern books. In their bestselling works *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and *The Messianic Legacy,* the writing team of Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln (hereafter referred to as "Baigent") document the existence of a secret society known as the Prieuré de Sion which reportedly came into existence in A.D. 1188. According to Baigent, a central belief of the Prieuré is that Jesus had children whose European descendants eventually married into the royal house of the Franks in the fifth century A.D., and this created a regal bloodline known as the Merovingians. The

Merovingians were influential in Europe and married into the powerful Hapsburg dynasty in the 18th century. Merovingian descendants—and hence descendants of Jesus—still live today. Baigent believes that the Prieuré is dedicated to protecting and/or aiding the Merovingians who may be plotting to establish themselves as global monarchs by right of their supposed descent from Jesus, although this has never been publicly confirmed by the modern Prieuré.

The existence of the Prieuré de Sion does not in itself prove that Jesus had children. Influential people can, and often do, believe false and silly things just like other people. Furthermore, the modern Prieuré might only be a small right-wing sect founded in 1956 by a man named Pierre Plantard who borrowed the Prieuré name. The original Prieuré may have ceased to exist in 1617 after being absorbed by the Jesuits. Skeptics have even suggested that the new Prieuré planted false documents in libraries and gave them to writers like Baigent to promote its dubious goals. Despite the Prieuré's great mystique, including its central role in the bestselling novel *The Da Vinci Code*, the group may not be particularly influential today except as an inspiration for writers.

Did Christ say anything about marriage and procreation?

If he was a traditional Jew, he would have been expected to marry and have children. When his disciples commented that it is better not to marry, Jesus responded, "That is a course not everyone can accept, but only those for whom God has appointed it." (*Matthew* 19:11-12, REB). This statement indicates that Jesus thought celibacy was only appropriate for a limited number of people, and he did not say that he was one of them. In the very next paragraph, he expresses an appreciation of children: "Let the children come to me; do not try to stop them; for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." (*Matthew* 19:14-15, REB).

As we have seen, we cannot rule out the possibility that Jesus experienced the joys of creating a family. His religious mission would have posed a danger to his wife and children if he had lived openly as a husband and father, but he nevertheless remained loyal to them, perhaps to the point of being ready to sacrifice his own life to save his son.

Options

As Bernie's lunch party talked, a pretty five-year-old girl emerged from the house.

"Everyone," Bernie announced, "I want you to meet my granddaughter. Ellie, come sit on grandpa's lap."

Ellie ran to him and happily did as she was told.

"Who is that man?" she pointed to Joe.

"His name is Mr. Christ," Bernie answered.

"May I sit with him?" she inquired.

"If it is OK with him."

"Of course," Joe smiled at her.

Ellie made a dash to Joe, seated herself on his knees, and leaned her head against his chest.

"Why are you here?" she asked.

"I have many reasons, and your grandfather is offering to help me."

"He'll help you a lot!" Ellie assured him. "He always helps mommy. He makes movies, too."

"Oh. Does he make good ones?"

"Sometimes."

Everyone in the group laughed except the World Unicom reps who merely deepened their smiles of bemused pity.

"What's your favorite movie?" Joe continued.

"Umm...*The Magic Rabbit!*"

"I haven't heard of that one."

"That's because I thought it up all by myself."

"That's the best kind of movie."

"Will you be my friend? Grandpa, can he be my friend?"

"Of course, honey," Bernie gushed. "Now, darling, you go back to Katie. Your momma will be here soon to get you. We need to do grown-up talk now."

"Goodbye," Ellie said to Joe. "I hope you come back soon. I'll let you play with my Easter Parade Barbie."

"That will be very special," Joe replied with a hug.

Ellie disappeared back into the house, and Joe turned to address Bernie.

"I have considered your advice about being photographed with beautiful women," Joe said, "but it will be difficult to find anyone who matches your granddaughter's sweetness."

"She's the light of my life," Bernie agreed.

"But I must ask seriously," Joe continued, "what if I am not inclined to date women at this time? What if I choose to have a male companion at this juncture? Would you withdraw your support?"

Everyone shifted uneasily. Even the World Unicom smiles turned into grimaces of confusion.

"Uh, well," Bernie stammered. "Of course not! Right, Orie? Gay is OK! We can still set you up with dates to make the public think you're hetero. Lots of women are OK with that because it can give a boost to their careers. Your secret is perfectly safe!"

"Absolutely!" Orion piped in. " And if you don't want to do that, open gayness is getting trendy."

"Well, we might need to be careful about that," Bernie responded. "If the Pope and all the fundie preachers reject Joe because he's gay, your Second Coming promotion could be dead in that water."

"But hold on a minute," Orion cautioned. "Is that what you're really telling us, Joe? That you're gay?"

Chapter 17

Jesus: The Gay Man

CAUTION

This chapter contains discussions of explicit and controversial sexual behaviors. Persons offended by such matters should proceed directly to the next chapter.

On June 27, 1969, a civil disorder broke out in New York City's Greenwich Village when police raided a popular gay bar called the Stonewall Inn. This was the start of the famous Stonewall Riots that galvanized gay people into a widespread social and political movement. This movement has been so successful that even the door to marriage was opened in Canada, the United States, and several other countries. The most vocal opponents to this expansion of gay rights have been Christians who, along with many Jews and Moslems, believe that homosexuality is a serious spiritual sin condemned by God. Christians typically cite the following passages from the Bible to support their view:

Old Testament:

1. *Genesis* 18:1-19:29. This is the famous story of Sodom and Gomorrah—two ancient cities that were destroyed by God because of their immorality. The degenerate nature of Sodom is illustrated when two male angels are in the home of a man named Lot. The house becomes surrounded by "all the townsmen of Sodom, both young and old—all the people to the last man..." (*Genesis* 19:4, NAB). The crowd calls out to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Send them out to us so that we can have intercourse with them." (*Genesis* 19:5, NJB). Lot tries to dissuade the mob by offering up his virgin daughters instead. The angels go outside and blind everyone with a flash of light. The next morning, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are reduced to ashes by a rain of sulphur wrought by God.

2. *Leviticus* 18:22. "You must not lie with a man as with a woman; that is an abomination." (REB). The *New Jerusalem Bible* makes this passage more explicit: "You will not have intercourse with a man as you would with a woman. This is a hateful thing."

3. *Leviticus* 20:13: "If a man has intercourse with a man as with a woman, both commit an abomination. They must be put to death; their blood be on their own heads!" (REB).

4. *Judges* 19:22-25. A traveling man and his female concubine are given shelter at a home in the city of Gibeah. Wicked men of the city surround the house and tell the owner, "Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him." (*Judges* 19:22, NIV). The homeowner encourages them to rape his virgin daughter instead, but they wind up ravaging the concubine all night, and she is dead by the next day.

New Testament:

5. *1 Timothy* 1:9-10: "...laws are not framed for people who are upright. On the contrary, they are for criminals and the insubordinate, for the irreligious and the wicked, for the sacrilegious and the godless; they are for people who kill their fathers or mothers and for murderers, for the promiscuous, homosexuals, kidnappers, for liars and for perjurers—and for everything else that is contrary to...the gospel that was entrusted to me." (NJB).

6. *1 Corinthians* 6:9-10: "Do you not realize that people who do evil will never inherit the kingdom of God? Make no mistake—the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, the self-indulgent, sodomites*, thieves, misers, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers, none of these will inherit the kingdom of God." (NJB)

7. *Romans* 1:26-32. Paul describes what happened to some people when they refuse to embraced Christianity:

> ...God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them. (REB)

* By its correct definition, a "sodomite" is a person who engages in genital-anal sex. Because many (but not all) homosexuals engage in this practice, "sodomite" is often equated with "homosexual," and therefore some Bible translations inaccurately use "homosexual" in this passage instead of "sodomite." Sodomy, of course, is not exclusive to homosexuals. Heterosexual sodomy is not uncommon.

Whew! There seems to be little room for doubt that the Bible condemns homosexuality. Some Christians believe that AIDS is God's way to punish gay people, *i.e.*, it is their "due penalty for their error." A handful of Christians even advocate the death penalty for homosexuality based on Paul's words "they deserve to die."

In light of all this, it is surprising to learn about the growth of gay Christian churches in the United States and elsewhere. Some mainstream denominations accept openly gay people into their congregations and leadership. Even more remarkable is a statement we read in *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto:*

> ...the gay and lesbian community has raised the question of Jesus' sexual intimacy, claiming Jesus as one of their own. This is hardly a strange social phenomenon. African American Christians have claimed the black Christ for their liberator...."[1]

Is the Gay Jesus just wishful thinking on the part of gays, or is there evidence for it? The question seems outrageous. How could any gay or bisexual person be the Biblical Messiah?

The startling answer may be that the Bible, when correctly translated, does not condemn homosexuality and even holds many gay relationships in high regard. It appears that the Old and New Testaments were grievously mistranslated for centuries because of an anti-gay bias that had begun to infect Judaism and Christianity long ago. The anti-gay passages quoted above, when correctly translated and interpreted, say something different:

Genesis 18:1-19:29:

The sin of Sodom was not homosexuality. It appears that the townsmen were trying to rape the angels. Any form of rape,

whether heterosexual or homosexual, would be sinful. The sin was therefore not homosexuality, but attempted rape.

In his videotape series *Homosexuality and the Bible,* Pastor Samuel Kader offers an even more compelling interpretation by utilizing *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. Strong's* identifies each word in the Bible with its own number that can be referenced against the original Hebrew or Greek. In the Sodom and Gomorrah story, the original Hebrew word translated as "townsmen" (*Strong's* #582: *énôwsh*) actually means "mortals," *i.e.,* all citizens in town (men, women, and children) were outside Lot's home, not just the men. ("Men" meaning "male" is usually *Strong's* #376, and this is the word that was used later in the same story when Lot offered his virgin daughters to "men"). The Hebrew word translated as "have intercourse" or "rape" is *Strong's* #3045 (*yâda'*), but this is nearly always used in *Genesis* to mean "to know" or "become acquainted" in a *non*sexual way; the word properly indicates sexual intercourse when it is joined to a phrase indicating that a woman became pregnant or gave birth (*e.g.,* "Adam acquainted himself with Eve, and she became pregnant..." (*Genesis* 4:1)). In the Sodom story, *yâda' is* not connected to a phrase indicating pregnancy or birth, and therefore it probably does not mean sexual intercourse. If a sexual meaning had been intended, the Hebrew word *shâkab (Strong's* #7901) would have more likely been used.

The best interpretation of the story is that the citizens of Sodom were outside Lot's home demanding that he reveal his guests so that everyone could see who they were. For some reason, the townspeople were angry at the angels. Lot tried to distract the men by using the shoddy ploy of offering them his virgin daughters, but the hostility of the townspeople was too intense.

As *The Catholic Study Bible* notes, even Old Testament prophets declared that the "sin" of Sodom had nothing to do with homosexuality: "...according to Isaiah (1,9f; 3,9), it was a lack of social justice; Ezekiel (16,46-51) described it as a disregard for the poor, whereas Jeremiah (23,14) saw it as general immorality."[2]

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13*:*

Many Biblical laws were designed to protect health. *Leviticus* offers many "do's and don'ts" in regard to washing, cleaning and cooking. The words about homosexuality are part of a long list

of sexual taboos primarily involving incest. When *Leviticus* states that men should not have intercourse with men "as with a woman," it seems to be saying that men should not have intercourse with each other in the same *manner* as with women. This could mean that *Leviticus* only condemns the act of a male penetrating into another male, *i.e.,* having sex in a manner similar to heterosexual intercourse. From a health perspective, this made sense. Anal intercourse can cause rectal bleeding, and this may lead to infection and gangrene poisoning. In those days before antibiotics, such wounds could be fatal (and they still can be if untreated). It made sense to ban that explicit type of sex, but that does not mean that other forms of homosexual expression were outlawed. In fact, it is argued that *Leviticus* cannot not be condemning homosexuality *per se* since it says nothing about lesbian activity.

An even more persuasive analysis is rooted in *Strong's.* The controversial sentence in *Leviticus* 20:13 is based on the following Hebrew words*:* "If a man [*Strong's* #376: *'îysh*] has intercourse [*Strong's* #7901: *shâkab*] with a man [*Strong's* #2145: *zâkâr*] as with a woman [*Strong's* #802: *'ishshâh*], both commit an abomination [*Strong's* #8441: *tôw'êbâh*]." The Hebrew word for the first "man" is different than the second "man," but they have been mistakenly translated as though they mean the same thing. *Leviticus* clearly intends a distinction between them. The first "man" is correctly translated as the generic "man," but the second "man" is *zâkâr* which denotes a male who is "noteworthy." Looking further at the sentence, the Hebrew word translated as "woman" (*'ishshâh*) was commonly used to mean "adulteress." The Hebrew word translated as "abomination" (*tôw'êbâh)* commonly meant "idolatry,' *i.e.,* forbidden worship. So what does *Leviticus* really say is forbidden?

Some Gentile fertility cults offered sex with priests or young male prostitutes. The "noteworthy" men of *Leviticus* were probably those priests and prostitutes. Jewish Law prohibited the Jews from consorting with them because it would constitute a form of idolatrous worship. The best translation of *Leviticus* 20:13 seems to be, "If a man commits adultery with a temple male, both commit idolatry." The offense is temple prostitution, not homosexuality.

Kader offers another interpretation by pointing out the wartime custom of humiliating a vanquished ruler by raping him, kill-

ing him (or killing first and then raping), and offering the dead body to a religious idol as a way to give thanks for victory. The "noteworthy" males in *Leviticus* may be conquered rulers, and *Leviticus* bans Israeli soldiers from raping them. In fact, *1 Samuel* 31:1-10 says that Jewish king Saul took his own life after being wounded in battle because he did not want to be "abused" by the uncircumcised enemy. (Even here the problem is not homosexuality itself, but having sexual contact with an uncircumcised non-Jew). If this analysis is correct, then the *Leviticus* passage can be translated, "If a man sexually ravishes a [conquered] notable, it is idolatry." However, *Leviticus* seems to ban consensual sex, not rape, so the better translation is the one involving temple prostitution*.

Judges 19:22-24:

As in the Sodom and Gomorrah story, the sin seems to be rape, not homosexuality. The men raped the female concubine, and this was deemed a wicked act. The Hebrew word translated as "have sex" (when the people outside said they wanted sex) is once again Strong's #3045 (*yâda'*), which usually means to know, and "men" is again *Strong's* #582 (*énôwsh)* which usually means townspeople or mortals. Like the Sodom and Gomorrah story, angry people were outside the house demanding to know who was inside. They intended to kill the traveler, not have sex with him, as the traveler later tells others. (*Judges* 20:5). The motive? Hostilities were apparently brewing between the people of Gibeah and the tribe from which the traveler had come, and those tensions erupted into a bloody war after this episode. The absurdity of translating

* It is often pointed out that *Leviticus* contains a number of antiquated laws that no one follows, not even devout Christians, and it is therefore hypocritical to use *Leviticus* to condemn anyone. For example, *Leviticus* demands animal sacrifices to compensate for many types of sins. It forbids eating lobster and shrimp (11:10-11), wearing clothing woven from two kinds of material (*e.g.,* cotton-polyester blends)(19:19), and cutting hair at the sides of the head or clipping off the edges of beards (19:27). *Leviticus* advocates death by stoning for a variety of offenses, and it permits slavery (25:44-46). It has been argued that no man can legitimately use *Leviticus* to condemn homosexuality until he also stops cutting his hair on the sides and begins sacrificing goats at the local church.

yâda' as "have sex" becomes apparent when it is used one book later in passages like *1 Samuel* 3:7: "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord..." (NIV). Few people would argue that this passage should read, "Now Samuel did not not yet have sex with the Lord..."

1 Timothy 1:9-10:

The two controversial words in this passage are "promiscuous" and "homosexuals."

The Greek word translated as "promiscuous" is *malakós (Strong's #3120*). Sometimes *malakós* is translated as "effeminate," and it can also mean catamites (boys kept for sexual purposes, which was typically done in fertility cults). However, in all instances where *malakós* is used in the New Testament, it means soft or fine clothing, such as in *Matthew* 11:8: "What did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces." (NAB). *Luke* 7:25 has the same quote and uses *malakós* the same way. It was common for people of wealth to display their material good fortune with expensive clothing. When *1 Timothy* refers to *malakós,* it is probably referring to vain irreligious people who parade their material wealth, or to young male temple prostitutes. In *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality,* Boswell concludes that it refers to general moral weakness.

A different interpretation of *malakós* is that it means "soft" in the sense of being "weak" or "spineless." When *1 Timothy* was written, Christians were suffering persecution, and some victims denounced Christ to save themselves. Perhaps *1 Timothy* is saying that these "spineless" Christians would not attain to heaven.

This brings us to the second controversial word, "homosexuals," which is a translation of the Greek *arsénókóités (Strong's #733). Strong's* gives it the same definition as the King James Bible, namely "sodomite," but this might be one of the few instances where *Strong's* is simply wrong. The word *arsénókóités* was apparently invented by the writer of *1 Timothy* or someone responsible for the Greek translation because it exists nowhere else in the entire Greek literature of the time. In fact, *arsénókóités* was not used again until about A.D. 383 when Jerome defined it as "male prostitute." *Arsénókóités* is really a combination of two words: *arsén (Strong's #730)* which means a strong male (capable of "lifting") and *kóité (Strong's #2845)* which derives from the word "couch" but has a connotation of "co-

habitation" or even "male sperm." *Arsénókóités* is better translated as a strong or virile man who "cohabits" or is the source of sperm. *1 Timothy* may therefore be talking about catamites (*malakós*) and the virile males (*arsénókóités*) who lie down with them sexually (perhaps on a couch). Since improper worship is the focus of related passages in *1 Timothy*, this epistle is most likely repeating the Old Testament ban on temple prostitution.

1 Timothy's lament that women gave up "natural" intercourse for "unnatural" is not necessarily a reference to lesbianism. It can mean variations of heterosexual intercourse. For a long time many Christians believed that only face-to-face sex was acceptable (*i.e.*, "the missionary position"), and other behaviors like oral intercourse were unnatural.

Romans 1:26-32:

Chapter 1 of *Romans* is concerned with idolatry, *i.e.*, people who "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles." (*Romans* 1:23, NRSV). Paul may have been saying that God would cause idolaters to develop homosexual feelings as a punishment for their improper worship; in other words, becoming homosexual was punishment in itself. (See, *e.g.*, *The Sins of Scripture* by J. S. Spong).

A better interpretation might be that Paul was focusing on a small subclass of idolaters: those who would be diagnosed today as sociopaths or criminally insane, *i.e.*, people who are usually executed because of their serious crimes. When Paul talks about such men abandoning their natural sexual orientation to lust after other men, he appears to be discussing a prison phenomenon: men who abandon their heterosexual orientation to engage in prison sex with other males, and then return to heterosexuality when released. This type of sex is rarely about love; it is usually about dominance and power. Paul may have known of such people who also engaged in idolatrous sexual rites. When Paul wrote of women abandoning natural relations for unnatural ones, there is no specific reference to homosexuality: prostitution and forbidden forms of heterosexual behavior are just as likely.

Unfortunately, *Romans* (or the Greek version that we must rely on) is not the best-written of Paul's epistles, but his meaning seems abundantly clear. The introductory words to *Romans* 1:18-32

say that he is talking about idolaters. If those words are deleted, then *all* of *Romans* 1:18-32 must be thrown out because the verses about sexual activity do not stand on their own without the reference to idolatry. The obvious inference is that "gay is OK" as long as it does not involve idolatrous worship.

As we have seen, the condemnations of homosexuality in the Bible were actually bans against temple prostitution. Other Old Testament passages illustrate how those narrow prohibitions were mistranslated to include all homosexuality. For example, the King James Version ("KJV") of *Deuteronomy* 23:17 gives us this translation: "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel." The words "whore" and "sodomite" are wrong, and other English-language Bibles correctly use "temple prostitute." In *1 Kings* 14:22-24 KJV, we read, "And there were also sodomites in the land, and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel." Again, other English translations use words like "temple prostitute," *i.e.*, temple prostitutes were committing idolatry ("abominations"). *1 Kings* 15:11-12 KJV says, "Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord as did David his father, and he took away the sodomites, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made." You guessed it, "sodomites" should read "temple (or shrine) prostitutes," and this is clear because the same sentence mentions "idols." We find the same thing in *1 Kings* 22:46 KJV, *2 Kings* 23:7 KJV, and *Job* 36:13-14 KJV.

In regard to the New Testament, it is argued that Paul might have been gay himself and would not have condemned homosexuality *per se*. He never traveled with a wife, and his marital status is ambiguous*. An apocryphal writing called *The Acts of Thecla* (2nd century) describes a strong emotional bond between Paul and his female disciple Thecla, but she had taken a vow of abstinence. Paul's letters, on the other hand, reveal a strong love of other males. When

* One early heresy said that Paul was a Greek man who converted to Judaism and had himself circumcised solely for the purpose of marrying a Jewish priest's daughter. He failed to get the girl, and for that reason he later attacked Jewish law and the practice of circumcision. Centuries prior to this story, Clement of Alexandria interpreted one of Paul's epistles to mean that he was married but did not take his wife on his travels.

he wrote to a slave owner named Philemon, he mentioned a slave named Onesimus "who is my very heart." (*Philemon* 12, NIV). In *2 Timothy,* he professed deep feelings for a Greek youth named Timothy who traveled extensively with Paul. When they were not together, Paul missed him terribly: "...I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day. I yearn to see you again, recalling your tears, so that I may be filled with joy." (*2 Timothy* 1:3-4 NAB). When Paul neared the end of his life, he sent for Timothy. Although scholars debate whether *1* and *2 Timothy* are forgeries, Timothy was unquestionably one of Paul's companions.

If Paul was gay, he may have abhorred his feelings: "...sin produced within me all kinds of lustful desire..." (*Romans* 7:8, NRSV). Several verses later, he seems to admit that he occasionally yielded to his urges: "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it." (*Romans* 7:18, NRSV). Could this mean that he was a self-loathing or self-repressing gay? Maybe, especially if his words in *Romans* and possibly elsewhere really were intended to denounce homosexuality. Some people who experience unwanted gay feelings strongly attack homosexuality as though doing so will disguise the attacker's desires or make him heterosexual. This strategy never works and only creates a climate of intolerance that hurts other people. It is also possible that Paul was gay and not a hypocrite about it; he simply thought that celibacy was the best route to take*.

If Paul was gay, he would not be a good role model due to his internal conflicts. The Old Testament has much better ones.

Perhaps the most moving love story in the entire Bible is the tale of David and Jonathan. According to *1 Samuel,* God chose a young man named David to become the next king of Israel. David

* If Paul was a celibate gay, it may have been due to rejection, which is a common experience of older gay men who are smitten with younger males. The New Testament contains no physical description of Paul, but we do find one in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* (*c.*A.D. 185-189) where he is described as a man of small stature with thinning hair, crooked legs, joined eyebrows, and a hooked nose. He was in good health, friendly, and possessed of an angelic appearance. If Paul was gay, his age and physical features may have garnered him sexual rejection from youths like Timothy even if they were otherwise willing to be his traveling companions.

is described in *1 Samuel* 16:12 as good-looking and "ruddy" (red hair or reddish skin) with beautiful eyes (or appearance). The Jewish king at that time was Saul, and he welcomed David into the palace after the young man distinguished himself on the battlefield and demonstrated his musical talents. This was a happy event for Saul's son Jonathan who developed a powerful love for David. According to a typical English translation:

> ...the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul...Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.
>
> *1 Samuel* 18:1 (NRSV)

If the original Hebrew words in the first two sentences are literally translated, we can arrive at the following meaning. (Numbers indicate *Strong's*):

> ...Jonathan (#3083) [was] knitted (or "closely joined") (#7194) [by] bodily desire (#5315) [to] David (#1732) [and] affection (#157); [for] Jonathan (#3083) [David] felt bodily desire (#5315)....Cut [between] (#3772) Jonathan (#3083) [and] David (#1732) [was] a covenant (#1285) [of] love (#160) [and] bodily desire (#5315).

Jonathan's act of stripping for David reinforces the sexual interpretation of this passage.

Saul later gave David a woman named Michal in marriage, but the king became jealous of David because he demonstrated greater favor with God and was more popular with the people. Saul tried to engineer David's death by sending him on dangerous military missions, but when that failed, he ordered Jonathan and some attendants to murder him. Jonathan, however, "delighted (#2654) [in] David (#1732) exceedingly (#3966)" and helped David find a hiding place in the fields. Jonathan pleaded with his father to spare David's life, and Saul relented. David returned to the palace but was sent on more military missions.

Relations between Saul and David soured again, and David had to flee. Jonathan remained loyal to his companion, and they

devised strategies for hiding David and secretly communicating with each other. The same vows of "love" and "bodily desire" are repeated in *1 Samuel* 19:17. During one secret rendezvous in the fields, Jonathan and David kissed and wept (*1 Samuel* 20:41). The word translated as "kissed" is *Strong's* #5401 (*nâshaq*) which has a root in *nâsaq* (*Strong's* #5400) meaning "burn, kindle"; *i.e.*, theirs was probably a very passionate kiss. English translations of this episode say that Jonathan and David were each a "friend" (*Strong's* #7453: *rêa'*), but this Hebrew word can also mean "lover."

Saul tried to capture David over a long period of time, so Jonathan never lived with David again. Meanwhile, David would eventually take eight wives (including one of Jonathan's sisters) and carry on an affair with a woman named Bathsheba. When Jonathan and his father perished in battle, David was terribly grieved and said of his friend:

> I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother!
> most dear have you been to me;
> More precious have I held love for you
> than love for women.
> *2 Samuel* 1:26, NAB

The obvious reading of this story is that David had a passionate homosexual relationship with Jonathan, and yet David is one of the most important figures in all of Judaism. The Old Testament says that his dynasty will rule God's kingdom on Earth. (See, *e.g., Isaiah* 9:7).

The tale of David and Jonathan might help us understand *Ecclesiastes* 4:9-11. The writer of *Ecclesiastes* was a son of David and may have been King Solomon. *Ecclesiastes* expresses great affinity for David and applauds relationships between men who share a life and bed together:

> Two are better than one,
> because they have a good return for their work:
> If one falls down,
> his friend can help him up.
> But pity the man who falls
> and has no one to help him up!
> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
> But how can one keep warm alone?
> (NIV)

Wives rarely worked in those days, and so we can assume that the passage is not talking about a man and woman. *Ecclesiastes* is relaxed with the idea of two men who "lie down" together and keep each other warm. "Lie down" in this passage is *Strong's* #7901 (*shâkab*) which can mean to lie down for purposes of rest or sleep, but it is also given a sexual meaning in other parts of the Old Testament. The most obvious interpretation of *Ecclesiastes* 4:9-11 is that God approves of devoted gay relationships. To some people, this is reflected in the Old Testament characters of Ruth (who was David's ancestor) and Naomi (Ruth's mother-in-law) when Ruth says, "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge..." (*Ruth* 1:16, NRSV).

Both the Old and New Testaments speak of "eunuchs." "Eunuch" today refers to a man who has been castrated or is born without proper genitals. The original Hebrew word for "eunuch" in the Bible was *çâriyç* (*Strong's* #5631) which comes from an unused root word meaning "to castrate." However, most Old Testament eunuchs were positive characters who found favor with God, and so it is unlikely that they were castrated men since *Deuteronomy* 23:1 prohibits men from entering God's congregation if their testicles have been crushed or their penises cut off. *Leviticus* 21:16-24 forbids Hebrew priests from participating in certain temple rituals if they are physically marred*. This means that Old Testament eunuchs are probably psychological eunuchs, *i.e.*, men not inclined to procreate—gay men. The story of Daniel provides an example:

Daniel 1:1-15 tells of a bright and handsome young man named Daniel who had no physical defects. He was captured with

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* Castration was a common practice in the ancient world, especially by crushing the testicles. Rulers knew that castrated men could not create rival dynasties, and so eunuchs often attained high administrative positions. Some boys and youths were castrated to preserve their androgynous beauty for purposes of male prostitution. These practices were largely condemned under Jewish law.

three friends when Babylon invaded Judah. They were taken to the palace of the Babylonian king to be educated. Palace cuisine, however, fell below Daniel's standards because it was not prepared according to Jewish law, so he asked the "master of the eunuchs" (*Daniel* 1:8, REB) to be excused from eating it. The eunuch granted Daniel's request because of their strong bond: "God allowed Daniel to receive faithful love and sympathy from the chief eunuch." (*Daniel* 1:9, NJB). The original Hebrew word translated as "sympathy" is *racham* (*Strong's* #7356) which comes from *râcham* (*Strong's* #7355) that has a root meaning "to fondle," *i.e.*, the word suggests that Daniel and the chief eunuch enjoyed sexual intimacy. The passage is best translated, "God allowed Daniel to receive faithful love and sexual affection from the chief eunuch." Daniel is another revered figure in Judaism whose prophecy in *Daniel* 7:13-14 is seen by Christians as a prediction of Christ. Daniel is never said to have taken a wife or female lover. It appears that he was gay.

Homosexual contact may have contributed to a miraculous healing performed by another exalted prophet: Elijah (a.k.a. Elias). *1 Kings* 17:7-24 tells how a widow's son had become ill. Elijah healed the lad by taking him to a private chamber, putting him on the bed, stretching himself over the boy three times, and crying out to God with a request for healing. The passage describing this event (*1 Kings* 17:19-21) can be translated from the original Hebrew as follows. (Numbers indicate *Strong's):*

> ...[Elijah] lay with him sexually (#7901) on his own bed (#4296), and called (#7121) to Jehovah (#3068) [to ask for a healing].... [Elijah] stretched himself (#4058) on the young man (#3206) three (#7969) times (#6471) and called (#7121) to Jehovah (#3068) [to ask again that the boy be healed]...[The boy then recovered.]

Elijah lived a footloose life style with no apparent spouse or children. His primary companion was Elisha—an unmarried male about twenty-five years of age who resided with his parents until he joined Elijah. (*1 Kings* 19.) Elisha deeply loved his friend and refused to leave his side when the time came for Elijah to be taken to heaven. (*2 Kings* 2:1-7). After Elijah flew skyward in a chariot of fire, Elisha succeeded him as an esteemed Jewish prophet.

Elisha compensated for the loss of Elijah by traveling with his own male companion and servant named Gehazi. In a similar manner to Elijah, Elisha healed a boy who had reportedly died. *2 Kings* 4:32-36 relates that Elisha and Gehazi entered the boy's room, closed the door, and prayed. Elisha then stretched himself upon the boy "mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands." (*2 Kings* 4:34, NIV). The boy's flesh became warm. Elisha got up, walked back and forth, and stretched himself again across the boy. The reference of "mouth to mouth" could refer to mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but the passage was intended to describe a miraculous healing, not one performed with normal first aid.

These two healing episodes seem to reveal that intimate physical contact between an apparent gay man and boy is Biblically OK within a healing context. A homoerotic element is implied but not certain.

When it comes to homosexuality, *Isaiah* 56:1-5 may be the most startling passage in the entire Bible. These verses predict a future day when the entire world will be united under God:

> Thus says the Lord:
> ...
> To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
> who choose the things that please me
> and hold fast my covenant,
> I will give, in my house and within my walls,
> a monument and a name
> better than the sons and daughters;
> I will give them an everlasting name
> that shall not be cut off.
> ...
> for my house shall be called a house of prayer
> for all peoples.
> (NRSV)

Why is this passage so remarkable? It seems to say that the leaders of God's unified church will be chosen from the gay population *i.e.*, from among the psychological "eunuchs" (non-procreators). Those gay leaders will be esteemed above everyone else. *Isaiah* cannot be

referring to physical eunuchs (*i.e.*, castrated or deformed men) because the Old Testament clearly states that such people may not serve in the highest levels of the temples.

Some scholars contend that the above passage from *Isaiah* was directed to the Israelites who were alive when it was written: *Isaiah* was telling them that Israelites would become victims of the Babylonian Captivity. However, the universal religion predicted by *Isaiah* never arrived, and *Isaiah* had prophesied earlier about Earth in a broader sense, so most Jews and Christians believe that *Isaiah* 56:1-5 describes a global event still to come. This leads to an interesting belief expressed by Pastor Kader that the rise of gay churches in the late 20th/early 21st century is a sign that God is beginning to usher in the universal age predicted by *Isaiah.* Taking this idea a step further, the Biblical mistranslations about homosexuality can be viewed as an insidious, but ingenious, way to make Christians and Jews fight *against* God's plan by encouraging them to exclude and oppress gay people. As long as gays are prevented from assuming leadership roles in the churches, God's plan for humanity cannot be fulfilled. This would mean that the dreaded disease AIDS is not God's punishment of gays; instead, it can be perceived as a tool created by God's enemies to help thwart God's plan*.

Isaiah's words were very important to early Christians. The *Gospel of Mark* opens with his famous pronouncement to "prepare the way for the Lord." (1:1-3). The prediction of *Isaiah* 9:1-7 seems to be the very blueprint for Christianity, and *Isaiah's* words are quoted a number of times in the gospels. If the founding Christians interpreted *Isaiah's* "eunuchs" to be gays, then they would have expected God's Savior to be gay. Indeed, the earliest Christians did not shy away from embracing Old Testament characters who seemed to be gay or bisexual. Jesus was proudly proclaimed a descendant of David, and Elijah is closely linked with Christ's Second Coming in the Christian mind*. Elisha may have been a role model for Christ by reportedly reviving people from death, performing miraculous healings, feeding a multitude with a small amount of bread, and predicting the future.

* Disturbing conspiracy evidence has been published to indicate that the HIV virus may have been engineered in a bioweapons or bioresearch lab. (See, *e.g.*, *Emerging Viruses* by Dr. Leonard Horowitz.) Such evidence, to the extent that it may be true, supports the religious idea that AIDS is a weapon created by anti-God factions.

What did Jesus himself say about homosexuality?

Nothing that we know of. The closest he came was to declare that fornication (sex outside of marriage) arises from an unclean heart. (*Matthew* 15:19, *Mark* 7:21). Although this statement can be applied to gays since most societies did not permit homosexual marriages, it is more likely that Christ was concerned with heterosexual adultery and/or temple prostitution. The Greek word translated as "fornication" (*Strong's #4202: pórnéia*) means to act the harlot or engage in unlawful lust. The word was sometimes used figuratively to mean idolatry.

What is the evidence that Jesus was gay or bisexual?

John 11:1-44 tells of a young man named Lazarus who had two adult sisters: Mary of Bethany and Martha. Jesus had been acquainted with this family for some time. One day, Lazarus became sick, and his sisters summoned Christ with the message, "Lord, the man you love is ill." (*John* 11:3, NJB). *The NIV Study Bible* comments, "The relationship [between Jesus and Lazarus] must have been exceptionally close."[3] Lazarus died before Christ reached him, but through a miracle, Jesus restored him to life.

In 1958, a renowned scholar from Columbia University found a controversial document that has come to be known as *The Secret Gospel of Mark* (a.k.a. *Secret Mark,* for short). The discoverer was Morton Smith who was cataloging a library of old books at the monastery of Mar Saba twelve miles southeast of Jerusalem. On blank pages in the back of a 16th-century book, someone (probably in the 18th century) had hand-copied in Greek the text of an alleged letter written by Christian father Clement who lived *c.*A.D.

* Some early Christians thought that Jesus (who was called the "Son of Man") was actually Elijah returning to Earth. (*Matthew* 16:14). Other statements in the Synoptic gospels, including some attributed to Christ, indicate that John the Baptist was Elijah who had been reborn to announce Jesus' coming. (*Matthew* 17:9-13, *Mark* 9:9-13, and *Luke* 1:17). In *John* 1:21, John the Baptist specifically denies that he is Elijah, leaving many Christians to believe, once again, that Jesus was the reincarnated Elijah.

200. The linguistic style of the letter suggests that Clement was indeed the original author. There are those who suspect forgery, but so far it has been generally well-received by scholars. If *Secret Mark* is authentic, then it may have been an early version of the standard *Gospel of Mark*, or a longer secret version. *The Complete Gospels* informs us:

> *[Secret Mark]* differs from the standard version of Mark in that it has additional passages, which were intended only for those who had attained a higher degree of initiation into the church than the common crowd. It was, apparently, a version of Mark intended only for insiders.[4]

Clement's letter indicates that there were at least two versions of *Secret Mark* in circulation during his day. He assures the reader that the true *Secret Mark* does not contain blasphemous passages found in a heretical version, such as a description of Christ as a "naked man with naked man."

Secret Mark tells the story of an unnamed youth who is brought back to life by Jesus. It is virtually identical to the Lazarus story in New Testament *John*, so it is seen as a different version of the same event. According to *Secret Mark*, Jesus went to Bethany to visit "the young man whom Jesus loved."[5] The youth (who will be called Lazarus from this point on) was in a tomb when Christ arrived, and this is what happened:

> Just then a loud voice was heard from inside the tomb. Then Jesus went up and rolled the stone away from the entrance to the tomb. He went right in where the young man was, stuck out his hand, grabbed him by the hand, and raised him up. The young man looked at Jesus, loved him, and began to beg him to be with him. Then they left the tomb and went into the young man's house. (Incidentally, he was rich). Six days later Jesus gave him an order; and when evening had come, the young man went to him, a linen cloth having been draped over the naked body. He spent that night with him, because Jesus taught him the mystery of God's domain.[6]

Smith and *The Complete Gospels* believe that the linen draped over Lazarus' naked body was "some sort of early Christian baptismal garb."[7] This could mean that Jesus and Lazarus were involved in a days-long baptismal or resurrection ritual that was later misinterpreted by the author of *John* to be a miraculous "raising from the dead." As discussed earlier in this book, such rituals were practiced by groups to which Jesus may have belonged.

The tone of *Secret Mark* is unmistakably homoerotic. Was the love between Jesus and Lazarus more than the love of family or friends? Was the ritual homoerotic in nature?

The Greek word translated as "love" in *John* 11:3 ("the man you love is ill") *(Strong's #5368 (philéo))* is used elsewhere in the New Testament gospels to mean a strong or very personal love, and sometimes a kiss. Two verses later when Jesus is said to "love" the sisters and Lazarus as a family unit, the Greek *agapao (Strong's #25)* is used which means love in a moral, social, or intellectual sense. Jesus' love of Lazarus was therefore a love of greater intensity or intimacy than his general love of the family*.

The New Testament and outside traditions indicate that Lazarus remained a companion of Christ after the tomb episode. He may have even been present at Christ's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemene. Orthodox *Mark* tells of an unnamed youth (a.k.a. the "Naked Youth") who was there when it happened:

> ...they all [*i.e.*, the Apostles] left him [*i.e.*, Jesus] and fled. Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked.
>
> *Mark* 14:50-52 (NAB)

Just before the arrest, Christ had been agonizing over his upcoming fate while the Apostles slept. (It was customary to drink four cups of ritual wine at the Passover meal, and this would account for the Apostles' sleepiness.) The Naked Youth displayed strong emotional ties to Jesus, and it appears that he was keeping Jesus company during those final lonely moments in the Garden. The

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* *The Archko Volume* contains several passages that also suggest a possible homosexual bond between Jesus and Lazarus. See footnote 8.

Naked Youth's garb seems to have been the same type of linen that draped the young man in *Secret Mark*, and so it is a good guess that they were the same person*.

Another mystery youth in Jesus' life is often referred to as the Beloved Disciple ("the disciple whom Jesus loved"). He is never named, and his existence is only mentioned in *John*. The Beloved Disciple is first introduced in the Last Supper story:

> The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved [*i.e.*, the Beloved Disciple], was reclining at Jesus' side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him, "Master, who is it?"
>
> *John* 13:22-25 (NAB)

The Beloved Disciple sat directly beside Jesus, which is an indication of his importance to Christ**. Regarding *John*'s phrase "the one whom Jesus loved," *The NIV Study Bible* informs us, "The expression does not, of course, mean that Jesus did not love the others, but that there was a special bond with this man."[9]

The second reference to the Beloved Disciple comes when Jesus is on the cross and still conscious:

> Meanwhile near the cross on which Jesus hung, his mother was standing with her sister, Mary wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala [*i.e.*, Mary Magdalene]. Seeing his mother, with the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, Jesus said to her, "Mother, there is your son"; and to the disciple, "There is your mother"; and from that moment the disciple took her into his home.
>
> *John* 19:25-27 (REB)

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* One Christian legend says that the Naked Youth was Ignatius of Antioch (d. *c.*107), a man who would later become a Church Father and be sainted. Ignatius' birth date and age at time of death are unknown, but he is believed to have been martyred around A.D. 107, *i.e.*, about 77 years after the crucifixion. Unless Ignatius died at an extremely advanced age (which is possible), the legend would mean that Ignatius was a boy or teenager at the time of Christ's arrest.

** The fact that the Beloved Disciple put his head on Christ's chest reveals that they were comfortable with physical closeness. However, this was a common practice at banquets, especially among the Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Persians. Banquet attendees often reclined on beds surrounding a dining table with one guest resting his head on the bosom of another. This was probably the seating arrangement at the Last Supper.

This passage demonstrates that Jesus put a great deal of trust in him. It also rules out Mary Magdalene as the Beloved Disciple.

The third reference occurs when Magdalene goes to Christ's tomb and finds it empty:

> So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "they have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they put him." So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.
>
> *John* 20:2-8 (NAB)

The fourth mention of the Beloved Disciple involves a post-crucifixion episode when some Apostles are fishing. The resurrected Christ appears to them and performs a miracle that results in a large catch of fish.

The *Gospel of John* ends with the fifth reference to the Beloved Disciple:

> This is the same disciple who vouches for what has been written here. He it is who wrote it, and we know that his testimony is true.
>
> *John* 21:24 (REB)

Most people think that the Beloved Disciple was Apostle John himself who wrote in the third person to avoid an appearance of boasting about his special relationship to Christ. This belief was

reinforced by a once-popular apocryphal work called *The Assumption of the Virgin* in which John states unequivocally that he was the person who received mother Mary into his care. The leading Latin version of *Assumption* explains that Jesus loved John because he alone among the Twelve was a "virgin in body." In Christian art, John is usually portrayed as a youth*. Could this mean that Jesus was intimate with at least two young men: Lazarus and John? Morton Smith believes that Christ may have regularly engaged younger men in spiritual rituals involving sex.

Or was the Beloved Disciple actually Lazarus?

A good argument can be made that the Beloved Disciple who sat with Christ at the Last Supper was the Naked Youth who fled later**. This would mean that the Beloved Disciple was actually Lazarus—a hidden "Thirteenth Apostle"— and would better explain why the author of *John* mentions the Beloved Disciple in the third person: he really *was* talking about someone else***.

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* Another candidate can be added to the list: Aristion. Chapter 3 noted that he was an outer disciple of Christ who later became the companion of Presbyter John. Some scholars believe that Presbyter John was the originator of orthodox *John*. This creates a plausible scenario that Aristion was the Beloved Disciple who provided Presbyter John with information.

** *Mark* mentions the Naked Youth but not the Beloved Disciple. *John* mentions the Beloved Disciple but not the Naked Youth. *Mark* and *John* were written at different places and times, and so there is a good chance that they were referring to the same young man but using different labels to describe him and remembering different details about his actions that night. *John* remembers that he sat at the table, and *Mark* remembers that he fled later. It has also been suggested that John Mark (presumed author of *Mark*) was the Naked Youth and that he also referred to himself in the third person when he wrote his gospel.

*** In *James the Brother of Jesus*, Eisenman makes a case that the Beloved Disciple was Christ's brother James.[10] When Christ was on the cross giving his mother over to the care of the Beloved Disciple as her "son," he may have been expressing a literal truth: the Beloved Disciple was Mary's actual son and therefore Jesus' brother. On the other hand, Christ had once said that his true family consisted of his followers and not his biological family. He may have acted on those feelings by appointing a non-

Another detail in *John* supports the idea of Lazarus as the Beloved Disciple. *John* first mentions "the disciple whom Jesus loved" at 13:23 (the Last Supper episode), and Lazarus is never mentioned by name after that. This could mean that Lazarus became a full Apostle by the Last Supper, thereby changing his status from "the one you love" (*John* 11:3) to "the disciple whom Jesus loved." (*John* 13:23). As we will see in the next chapter, Lazarus later became a bishop in the Christian church, and this would have certainly made him eligible as the source of information for *John*.

A gay Christ would be expected to attract other gays to his inner circle. Were any of The Twelve gay or bisexual? Peter and Philip are said in non-Biblical traditions to have been married with children, and the idea of married Apostles seems to be confirmed in *1 Corinthians* 9:5. However, this is not true of all. Every one of them left their homes to travel with Christ, and this would have been unusual for heterosexual family men. In chapter 16, we noted the apocryphal *Gospel of Philip* in which the Apostles complain about Jesus showing greater affection for Magdalene: heterosexual men would not react with that kind of jealousy, but gay/bisexual men might. One Apostle is reported to have openly displayed a same-sex attraction, and that was Thomas in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* (3rd century). As he was traveling to India after the crucifixion, the resurrected Christ told him to go to a spot by the roadside:

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relative to act as Mary's "son."

A second-century Christian community believed that apostle Andrew had told the the story of Christ to someone named John (not the Apostle), and this became orthodox *John*. This might point to Andrew as the Beloved Disciple. He was among the first Apostles to enjoy special access to Christ. His name disappears from *John* after 12:22, and the first reference to the Beloved Disciple is at 13:23. This could mean that Andrew established a unique relationship to Jesus that earned him the special moniker. One problem with this theory is that Andrew, unlike Lazarus, was already a full Apostle when he is mentioned by name earlier in *John*, and there is no episode to explain why he would suddenly be called something different. Apostles Thomas and Nathaniel have also been proposed as the Beloved Disciple, but the evidence is weak. See, *e.g.*, Jennings' *The Man Jesus Loved*.

> And the apostle [*i.e.*, Thomas] went out to go where the Lord had commanded him; and when he was near the second milestone and had turned aside a little from the road, he saw lying there the body of a comely youth, and said: "Lord, was it for this that you brought me out here, that I might see this temptation? [11]

This chapter has raised an uncomfortable issue even for many gay people, namely adult-adolescent sex (pederasty). Age of consent issues have always been controversial. In the United States today, many states have a two or three-tiered age-of-consent structure: (1) people may legally start having sex in their early or mid-teens if they are married with court and/or parental approval, (2) at age 16 if they are legally married with parental (but not court) approval, or if that is the age of consent (which it is in about 70% of the states), and (3) at age 18, married or not. Age 16 is the most common age of consent throughout the world, ages 14 and 15 are common, and 13 and 12 are found in a few places.

In Christ's day, males were considered adults for purposes of marriage, sex, and the military not too long after puberty, but they were typically thought of as "youths" if they were between the ages of twelve and late adolescence. The Beloved Disciple must have been well into his teens by the crucifixion as evidenced by the fact that Jesus entrusted his mother to the Disciple's care. If the Beloved Disciple was Lazarus, that is further confirmation that he was at least an older teen since Lazarus became a bishop after the crucifixion. A sexual relationship between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple/Lazarus would have been within the age norms of his day and acceptable according to most age-of-consent laws today.

"Jesus' name is being dragged through the mud!" some people might still complain.

Such a reaction is possible from people who believe that same-gender sexual expression is inherently wrong. Others would see no injury at all to Christ's reputation. In fact, there are people who view a gay Jesus as an ideal. Episcopalian priest and writer Malcolm Boyd comments:

> Gay spirit, as we have come to understand it, fits Jesus easily. He appears to us as an androgynous man. Jesus shared his feelings, empathized with those of others, and was not afraid of intimacy. He was sensitive and vulnerable, consented to his own needs, knew how to receive as well as give to another. Jesus exalts the spiritual dimension inherent in a truly liberated expression of sexuality.[12]

How do we reconcile a gay Jesus with evidence from the previous chapter that he had a relationship with Magdalene and fathered children? It could mean that Christ was bisexual. This, too, is viewed by some people as an ideal. In the Gnostic *Pistis Sophia* (a combination of writings that started being penned *c.*A.D. 250), Jesus is a bisexual. Author Robert Goss comments:

> Many queer [*i.e.*, gay] Christians feel comfortable with the affection that Jesus had for Lazarus, for Mary Magdalene, and for the beloved disciple. They feel at home with the affectional ease of Jesus with both men and women.[13]

Open bisexuality was fairly widespread in the first century A.D., especially in regions influenced by Hellenism like Palestine and much of the Roman empire. Some of the great Greek thinkers like Socrates were enthusiastic in their praise of sexual love between men and beautiful adolescent males. Many married Greek men of wealth or high status had a male youth as a lover, and they were expected to genuinely care for and assist the youth. Jesus may have embraced this ideal, especially if he was a Gnostic as theorized in chapter 10. Although most Gnostics advocated celibacy, their beliefs made it possible to say that homosexuality is more "spiritually correct" than heterosexuality because heterosexual intercourse creates new prisons for souls, but homosexuality does not*.

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* Maybe some Gnostics hoped to spiritually liberate the human race by encouraging everyone to stop procreating. If the entire human race were to do so, humanity would peacefully vanish from the Earth in about a hundred years. Other Gnostics believed that the human race started out physically bisexual (*i.e.*, hermaphrodite) but degenerated into male and female. This theory was even advanced by Charles Darwin in his works *The Origin of the Species* and *The Descent of Man*. Some Gnostics believed in a future day when humanity would return to its original hermaphrodite nature.

It is argued that if Christ was the Son of God (or was God Himself), he could not have been gay or bisexual since homosexuality is against the natural order. Or is it?

Homosexuality is widespread throughout the animal kingdom. A far-reaching survey of gay behavior in the natural world is found in Dr. Bruce Bagemihl's *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity.* A surprisingly large number of animals engage in same-gender pairing, copulation, and erotic affection—insects, birds, dolphins, monkeys, just to name a few. In the the lower life forms, these couplings might be explained as misdirected instinct, but the same cannot be said of many creatures where the gay behaviors seem to come from true affection and preference. The behaviors occur even when there is heterosexual learning and opportunity. *Biological Exuberance* offers examples of male swans that nest together, female deer, lions, and other animals that mount each other, and male apes that engage in oral sex and mutual masturbation. It is probably wrong to say that these are unthinking behaviors: other studies reveal that many species interact socially and emotionally like human beings. (See, *e.g., When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals.*) Homosexuality is an established part of the natural world, even if it is a minority activity.

In regard to humans, several modern studies reveal that bisexuality may be the true norm as opposed to strict heterosexuality. Correctly defined, bisexuality is the tendency to be sexually attracted to members of both sexes, even if such attractions are not acted upon. It is the attraction that determines sexual orientation, not necessarily the activity. Bisexuality rarely means equal attraction; most people will be primarily attracted to one gender and only have fleeting attractions (usually not acted upon) for the other. For the majority of the human population, that means being heterosexual with only occasional homosexual attractions, with men being more prone to bisexuality than women. A 1993 study known as *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior* asked 1,335 people, "Have you had homosexual experiences?" Twenty-two percent of men and seventeen percent of women answered "yes."[14] It is safe to assume that incidents of fleeting attraction and homosexual fantasy (not acted on) are considerably higher. This assumption is born out by another finding first published in 1990 titled *The Kinsey Institute*

New Report on Sex: "...researchers have discovered that one of the most common fantasies among heterosexuals is having sex with a same-sex partner..."[15] The Janus Report reveals a significant irony because only 4% of the men and 2% of the women actually labeled themselves "homosexual," and only 5% of the men and 3% of the women labeled themselves "bisexual." This reveals an overwhelming public misunderstanding about what bisexuality really is.

Those who support the idea of a bisexual Christ argue that he was a man who accepted his true sexuality better than most of the human population. Sexuality to Jesus was not a question of category ("heterosexual," "homosexual," or "bisexual"), but it was a matter of quality. Author Rosemary Ruether comments:

> If there is anything at all to be said about the sexuality of Jesus, it is that it was a sexuality under the control of friendship. He could love John [*i.e.*, the Beloved Disciple] and Mary Magdalene, physically embrace and be embraced by them because first of all he knew them as friends, not as sexual objects.[16]

What can we learn from all of this? First of all, any person has the prerogative to believe that homosexuality is spiritually wrong, but condemning it in the name of the Bible appears to be a grave theological error. Correctly translated and interpreted, the Bible actually seems to embrace homosexuality (and heterosexuality) when practiced in the context of love, faithfulness, and healing. Both the Old and New Testaments appear to hold some gay/bisexual people in the highest esteem.

Whether Jesus was gay or bisexual is not really important. His statement of acceptance was unconditional: "...anyone who comes to me I will never turn away." He did not add, "...except practicing homosexuals" or "...homosexuals only if they try to change their sexual orientation." It does not appear that Jesus viewed sexual orientation as a matter of concern. Perhaps this tells us that we should stop dwelling on sexual matters so much and address issues that are much more important to our spiritual existences.

Rare Dreams

As her husband lunched across town with Joe, Serena returned home to direct the gardeners. It had been a busy day, and she decided to do something she rarely did: take a noontime nap.

The drone of the distant mower proved soothing as Serena rested her head on a king-size pillow and faded into a delicious sleep. Serena seldom remembered her dreams, but this one would stay with her.

She was running, but her body was different. From the look of her forearm, she was of moderate stature with tanned skin. The people around her were costumed like illustrations in a children's Bible story. She sensed that if she did not run quickly enough, she would miss something important, so she increased her pace and arrived at a busy outdoor market.

"Where is my love?" she asked a stranger dressed in a robe and turban.

"I saw it there," he pointed.

She walked to a table where soft suede leather boxes were on display. She sensed that her love was nearby.

"Please," she begged a merchant whose face she could not see, "show me where my love is."

The seller held out a jewel-encrusted box shaped like a heart. When she took it in her hands, it began to throb just like a human heart.

"Serena," whispered the seller. He raised his head so that she could see his face. It was Joe.

"Did you forget me?" she asked him.

"That I can never do," he replied lovingly. "You will always be my Mary Magdalene no matter how your other lives unfold."

Serena gently placed the box on the table, and Joe took her hands. His palms were bleeding, but the blood felt curiously soothing on her skin. He continued to speak.

"This is the happiest moment of my return, to touch you again. I allowed my work to be interrupted so that I could gaze at you again through human eyes."

"Where are you going next?" Serena asked. "Am I to go with you?"

"No. You have found a love worthy of you, and I am overjoyed. Remain with your husband, for your love is more precious to him than his wealth. He will always be faithful to you."

"But where did you go after we parted so long ago?" she cried. "My deepest pain was not knowing where your journey ended."

Chapter 18

Jesus: A Man of Uncertain Death

In Turin, Italy, sits a cathedral which houses Catholicism's most famous relic: a large linen cloth curiously imprinted with the life-size image of a bearded man who appears to be dead. Many people believe that this cloth—commonly known as the Shroud of Turin—was the burial linen of Christ. Although the Vatican has never officially declared the Shroud to be genuine, many people believe that the image was created as the result of Christ's oiled skin coming into contact with the cloth or by an unusual radiance from his body at the moment of resurrection.

The Shroud image looks like a photographic negative. The hands and feet bear crucifixion wounds, and the face appears swollen. The nose is disjointed and elongated as though it had been broken. A hundred scourge marks cover the back from an apparent flogging. A side injury corresponds to the rib wound of Jesus as described in the New Testament.

Does the Shroud of Turin prove the existence of Christ and the story of his crucifixion?

The authenticity of the Shroud has been disputed almost since it appeared. In a written report to Pope Clement VII dated 1389—about 32 years after the Shroud was first known to be on public display—Bishop Pierre D'Arcis said that his predecessor (Bishop Henri of Poitiers) had determined the cloth to be a fake; the offending artist had admitted to the fact.

In 1973, the Vatican allowed the Shroud to be scientifically tested. Bloodstains were analyzed, and the initial results seemed to come up negative for human blood. A later analysis revealed human DNA in a blood sample, but it was pointed out that any person who had ever touched or cried over the Shroud left a potential DNA signal.

A five-day battery of tests was conducted on the Shroud in 1978. Some scientists concluded that the image was caused by contact with a human body and that the blood was real, but other colleagues accused them of "scientific zealotry."

A small piece of the Shroud was cut away in 1988 and put through a carbon-14 test by three different laboratories. The unanimous result was a 99.9% certainty that the cloth originated from the period between A.D. 1000 and 1500, and a 95% certainty that it dated between 1260 and 1390. In other words, the cloth was spun more than a thousand years after Christ. This would place its origin at a time when Bishop D'Arcis said that an artist had admitted to hoaxing the image. It is also consistent with the historical evidence that the Shroud in its double-imprint image (*i.e.,* front and back of the body) did not appear in history until *c.*1355 when it was duplicated on a pilgrim's medallion to commemorate the first-known display in France.

Other problems exist with the Shroud. The head appears to be separate from the body and has a strange "base" line. This could mean that the cloth was draped over a bust to create the facial image, and a real human body was used for the remainder. (On the other hand, the base line image could have been caused by a rope or cloth secured at the neck—a common burial practice in Jesus' day.) The hair hangs as though the man is standing rather than reclining, but hair should not even be showing up if the image was caused by contact with the skin. The blood on the head is unrealistic: blood should spread and clot on the cloth instead of running down the hair in artistic rivulets. If the face image was caused by contact with a real body, then the face should be horizontally oblong (moon-shaped) instead of being in natural proportions. The fact that some "blood" remains bright red indicates that paint was used to create it, and scientist Walter McCrone of the 1978 Shroud of Turin Research Project speculates that the "blood" was a mix of red ocher and vermilion tempera paint.

If the Shroud is a hoax, then who created it, and why?

The face is almost identical to several portraits of Leonardo Da Vinci. (See *Turin Shroud* by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince.) Did he create the Shroud? Da Vinci was born in 1452 and died in 1519, and this would have placed him within the time parameters established by the carbon-14 results. Da Vinci was extremely inventive, and he may have been familiar with the basics of photog-

raphy. Art historian Nicholas Allen of Port Elizabeth University conducted an experiment showing that the Shroud may be the world's first known photograph that was created by using materials available during the era established by the carbon-14 test: a large linen cloth soaked in silver sulphate, dual glass lenses, a closed room ("camera obscura"), and a body hanging outside in the sun for at least eight hours. With this technique, Allen was able to create a full-size linen imprinted like the Turin Shroud. (See the PBS documentary *Secrets of the Dead: Shroud of Christ?*). The Turin Shroud has never been tested for the presence of silver sulphate.

If the Shroud image was caused by contact with a human body, it may have been the body of Knights Templar Grand Master Jacques de Molay who was tortured in 1307 by the Catholic Inquisition. The Knights Templar ("Knights of the Temple") were an order of knights with a mystical initiation system founded in 1118. The Templars fought in the Crusades for the Christian cause and became very powerful in Europe. They eventually fell out of favor with the Catholic Church, and the French king accused them of heresy and immorality. De Molay was caught up in a mass arrest along with 15,000 other knights on October 13, 1307—a year that falls within the carbon-14 results. The books *The Hiram Key* and *The Second Messiah* suggest that de Molay was held in the basement of the Templars' Paris temple where his torturers scourged and crucified him like Christ, including driving nails through his wrists. Still alive but barely conscious, de Molay "confessed," whereupon he was wrapped in a white shroud that Templars used in their ceremonies. He was then released to the family of another Templar leader, Geoffrey de Charney, and nursed back to health. His shroud, which had become faintly imprinted with his image largely due to oils, was washed by the de Charneys, folded, and put away. Seven years later, de Molay retracted his confession and was burned at the stake along with de Charney. The Shroud remained in storage for decades and was eventually provided to a local church for its first undisputed public exhibition. By then, the true identity of the image had been lost with the death of de Charney's nephew. People jumped to the conclusion that the image was of Jesus.

Believers in the Shroud's authenticity have responded with counter-arguments:

1. The carbon-14 results were contaminated by a process known as "bioplastic coating" caused by bacterial buildup. The Shroud had been publicly displayed many times during the previous six centuries. The small carbon-14 sample was cut from a corner of the Shroud that had been frequently gripped in human hands when displayed to the crowds. (The Shroud is now encased behind glass.) UV fluorescence photography of the Shroud reveals that the carbon-14 cloth sample was dramatically different in some ways than the rest of the Shroud. Bioplastic coating can cause carbon-14 dating errors of a thousand years or more.

2. The carbon-14 results were affected by a fire that had occurred in 1532 where the Shroud was stored. The fire caused a chemical modification of the linen, and this would have "rejuvenated" the cloth. In 1994, Dr. Dmitri Kouznetsov of the Biopolymer Laboratory in Moscow experimented on a linen sample that was indisputably created between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100 (*i.e.*, the time of Christ). The cloth was carbon-14 tested with a result of 385-107 B.C. Kouznetsov then exposed the sample to similar conditions that might have been caused by the 1532 fire, followed by another carbon test. This time the result said A.D. 1044 to 1272—an error of over 1,000 years. Using the same margin of error, Kouznetsov concluded that the Turin Shroud must have originated in the first or second century A.D.

3. Many details in the Shroud differ from the manner in which fourteenth-century artists were depicting the crucifixion. For example, Jesus was always shown with an open-topped halo of thorns, but the head wounds on the Shroud indicate that a cap of thorns had covered the entire top of his head. Artists depicted Christ with nails through his palms, but the Shroud wounds are at the wrists just below the palms which are more likely locations: nails in the palms would rip the hands open unless the body was supported by ropes or straps, but nails in the wrists could support the entire body. Driving nails into the wrists at the points indicated on the Shroud would damage nerves and cause the thumbs to go towards the palms, and that is what we see in the Shroud. These are details that few hoaxers would have known.

4. The flagellation wounds are consistent with a common whip used in ancient Rome. If the person in the Shroud was not Jesus, then it was another crucifixion victim or a masochistic model.

5. Pollen found on the Shroud would be consistent with a cloth that originated in first-century Jerusalem, traveled to several other places (including to Edessa where it became known as the Cloth of Edessa), and finally arrived in Europe courtesy of the Templars. (The pollen traces, however, do not rule out the Da Vinci or de Molay theories: Da Vinci or the Templars may have obtained imported linen from the Middle East.) In *The Blood and the Shroud*, Ian Wilson presents a believable path that the Turin Shroud could have traveled from Christ's body to the cathedral at Turin.

6. When the Shroud was repaired in 2002, restoration leader Mechthild Flury-Lemberg observed that the linen was sewn in a style that she had only seen once before in cloth found at Masada that dated from within seventy years of Christ's birth. It was a style not used in medieval Europe. Unless the Shroud linen was already more than a thousand years old before it was used to create a hoax (an unlikely but not impossible scenario), the Shroud probably originated from Jesus' time.

7. At least two centuries before the Shroud was first known to be on public display, texts were already mentioning the existence of a life-size image of Christ on a cloth. Ordericus Vitalis wrote in his *Ecclesiastical History* (*c.*1141) that the Edessa Cloth was miraculously created when Jesus used it to wipe sweat from his face, but an image of his entire body was formed on it. In *Otia Imperialia* (*c.* 1211), Gervase of Tilbury said that records from an ancient archive report that Jesus had prostrated himself on a linen and left a full-body image through divine power. A Hungarian manuscript dated to 1190 contains an apparent illustration of the Shroud with its herringbone weave and four small holes that are situated in a pattern identical to the four small "poker holes" in the Shroud.

8. Tests were conducted on a smaller linen known as the Cloth of Oviedo which is said to be the material that covered Christ's head when he was entombed. This smaller type of linen is called a *sudarim* – a fabric placed by Jews over the face of a deceased person at the moment death. *John 20:8* reports that Christ's *sudarim* was discovered in the empty tomb. This cloth reportedly survived the centuries to reach the Camara Santa Church in Oviedo, Spain. A blood stain on the Cloth is similar in shape to a Shroud stain, indicating that the Cloth and Shroud were once wrapped around the same body at the same time. Tests performed in the 1990's indicate that bloodstains on the Oviedo Cloth are the same rare AB blood type that may have been confirmed on the Turin Shroud, and only three percent of the human population shares this blood type. Body fluids on the Cloth are consistent with discharge that would come from a man's nose after he was removed from a crucifix and laid horizontally. The Oviedo Cloth can be traced with confidence to at least the sixth century, which is four hundred years before the earliest date indicated by the Shroud carbon-14 test.

A curious conspiracy theory has emerged about the Shroud. There are those who believe that the cloth is completely authentic, but someone in the Catholic Church deliberately sabotaged the carbon-14 test by substituting a piece of medieval cloth for the real one (or knowingly caused a contaminated piece to be used). (See, *e.g.*, *The Jesus Conspiracy* by Holger Kersten and Elmar R. Gruber). The accusation seems preposterous. Why would anyone in the Catholic Church deliberately cast doubt on an object that proves the existence of Christ and the reality of the crucifixion? The surprising answer might be this: if the Shroud is genuine, then it actually shows that Jesus did not die on the cross. He was still alive when he was wrapped. Proof of his survival would be a blow to Christian belief about his resurrection from death.

When a body is dead, the blood stops flowing and obeys the laws of gravity by sinking. The Shroud image shows an actively bleeding body on all sides, and this would mean that the heart was still pumping when it was being taken to the tomb. The Cloth of Oviedo also reveals active bleeding. The inescapable conclusion would be that the crucifixion did not kill Christ. Further scientific support for this idea was provided in 2003 by Dr. Stephen J. Mattingly, a microbiologist at the University of Texas Health Science Center. He proposed that the Shroud image was caused by the common skin bacterium *Staphylococcus epidermidis*. According to Mattingly's theory, the bleeding body was alive for a number of hours and acted as an incubator for the bacterium. Mattingly performed an experiment by coating his own face with excess skin bacteria and covering it with a damp linen cloth. The result was an image surprisingly similar to the Shroud image, albeit moon-shaped.

The best evidence that Jesus did not die on the cross is provided by the New Testament.

According to the orthodox gospels, Christ's body was placed in a tomb after being removed from the cross. Several days later, the body was no longer there and Jesus started making personal appearances to his supporters. The obvious conclusion is that Jesus' executioners had failed to kill him. This conclusion is supported by the Biblical statement that he was on the cross for less than a day—perhaps as few as three hours and probably not more than six or seven. As *The NIV Study Bible* tells us, "Crucified men often lived two or three days before dying, and the early death of Jesus was therefore extraordinary."[1] When Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Christ's body, "Pilate was amazed that he [*i.e.*, Jesus] was already dead." (*Mark* 15:44, NAB). Despite his surprise, Pilate granted Arimathea's request after being assured by a Roman centurion that the victim had perished. The act of surrendering the body to Joseph was unconventional in itself, as *The NIV Study Bible* points out: "The release of the body of one condemned for high treason, and especially to one who was not an immediate relative, was quite unusual."[2] (On the other hand, if Arimathea was Jesus' great uncle as discussed in chapter 13, such a release is entirely plausible.) These circumstances suggest that Christ's backers had gotten him off the cross quickly enough to save him.

How could Pilate and the Roman soldiers be fooled into thinking that Jesus had died so soon? One theory is that Christ suffered from a form of epilepsy. Some animals with this condition can be pushed into a state of hypothermia (low body temperature) and appear dead for about three days if they are given the drug reserpine and restrained for a few hours. This may have been the cause of Jesus appearing dead so quickly: he was an epileptic who was administered reserpine or a similar drug while restrained on the cross. A consequence of this might have been brain damage leading to behavioral changes such as anorexia or being unkempt. The New Testament reports that the resurrected Christ was not instantly recognized by some of the people who had known him.

Muslims hold it as an article of faith that Jesus did not die on the cross. The religion of Islam was founded by the prophet Muhammad about six hundred years after Christ. The Muslim holy

book, the *Koran*, honors Jesus as one of God's (Allah's) prophets. In fact, mother Mary is a much-respected woman in Islam with a chapter in the *Koran* named after her*.

According to *Koran* 4:157, "They slew him not but it appeared so to them." In other words, Jesus' executioners only thought that they had killed him. The *Koran* follows with a statement about Jesus being "raised by" or "ascended to" Allah, which is interpreted by the orthodox majority to mean that Christ was physically taken up to heaven *before* the crucifixion, and someone else was crucified in his place. Others interpret the passage to mean that Jesus survived the crucifixion because Allah decided to let him die a natural death later. In the *Kanz-ul-Aimal* – a collection of teachings attributed to Muhammad that were not included in the *Koran* – Jesus was saved from the cross, did some traveling, and avoided further persecution. A famous thirty-volume commentary about the *Koran* by Ibn-i-Jarir at-Tibri says that Jesus and his mother left Jerusalem after the crucifixion and traveled from one country to another. A belief held by Muhammad's wife is that Christ lived to a very old age, perhaps as old as 120.

The evidence of survival suggests that Jesus came extremely close to perishing, maybe to the point where his vital signs had stopped resulting in temporary clinical death, but he was revived in the nick of time before his coma or loss of vital functions became irreversible. In those days, such a recovery might have seemed

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* Then why is there such a big problem between Muslims and Christians? Muslims believe that Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were three prophets sent by God. Muhammad was the final prophet with the final revelation from God, and so it is the duty of all people to follow Islam. Those who fail to do so are "infidels" (nonbelievers). The Islamic "Hadith" (non-Koranic sayings of Muhammad) offer teachings that cause many Muslims to believe that Jesus will return to Earth one day with a person called Imam Mahdi to establish Islam as the world religion. When that happens, Christ will "break the cross," which some Muslims interpret to mean that he will destroy Christianity. Some Hadith seem to say that Christ's imposition of Islam on humankind will be violent, and non-Muslims will be forced to convert or die. In spite of this, most Christians have failed to convert to Islam just as most Jews do not pick up the banner for Christianity. The result has been centuries of hard feelings and war.

like a miracle wrought by God, perhaps even to Jesus who must have felt elated to wake up alive. Today we understand it as a medical phenomenon that happens regularly in hospitals around the world. Despite this, Christians are still taught that salvation requires them to hold firm to a belief that Christ's survival was a miraculous resurrection from death.

If Jesus survived the cross, where did he end his mortal life?

Jesus Died in England

If Christ's friends were lucky enough to prevent him from dying, they would have logically taken the next step by helping him to escape further danger. *Mark* 16:7 reports that the women who discovered the empty tomb were met there by a white-robed young man who announced that Jesus was risen and "is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." (NIV). It makes sense that the badly-wounded Christ would be whisked off to Galilee—a region of greater safety. That could only be a temporary stopover because there was still a risk of extradition, and the Romans would surely execute him again in a way that left no doubt that he was quite dead. Jesus needed to be placed much further away. Did he go to England?

In some widely-accepted accounts, Arimathea and some Apostles took Christianity to Britain shortly after the crucifixion. Eusebius wrote, "The apostles passed beyond the ocean to the Isles called the Britannic Isles."[3] St. Hilary of Poitiers (A.D. 300-367) added, "the Apostles built several tabernacles, and through all parts of the earth wherever it was possible to go; even in the Isles of the Ocean they built several habitations for God."[4] Britain's first historian, St. Gildas (the Wise) Albanicus (*c.*425-512), wrote:

> ...these islands, stiff with cold and frost, and in a distant region of the world, remote from the visible sun, received the beams of light, that is, the holy precepts of Christ,—who is the true Sun... —at the latter part, as we know, of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.[5]

Tiberius Caesar's reign ended with his death in A.D. 37, *i.e.,* five to six years after the presumed date of the crucifixion.

According to other English traditions, after Arimathea and his companions arrived there, King Arviragus gave them twelve hides* of land, and they built a church around a well in Glastonbury where Jesus had reportedly been earlier in life.

In *Drama of the Lost Disciples*, Jowett details some of the legends, histories, and letters written by Church fathers concerning Arimathea, Apostle Peter, Simon Zelotes ("the Zealot"), Philip, James (brother of Jesus), and many other Christians who went to England to evangelize or to escape Roman persecution. England became to them what Galilee had been to Christ: a place of refuge, although for Simon it may have been the place of his martyrdom after Rome launched a horrific eradication program against all things Christian and Druidic during the first and second centuries A.D. (Another tradition, however, has Zelotes dying in Asia). Even Paul and Luke reportedly made stops in Britain.

For Arimathea, Britain became his final home. In A.D. 450, it was recorded at Llandaff (a city near the Bristol Channel) that he and some associates were buried there. The epitaph on Joseph's grave declared, "I came to the Britons after I buried Christ. I taught. I rest."[6] This inscription suggests that Jesus had died earlier in the Middle East and was not resurrected. On the other hand, if his followers wanted to keep his survival a secret in order to protect him, then the epitaph might reflect an understandable cover-up.

There is a noteworthy detail about Arimathea's grave. The records at Llandaff indicate that he was buried over the Virgin. In other words, mother Mary was buried at the same location, implying that she also went to England after her son's ordeal. Arimathea was said in non-Biblical traditions to be the "paranymphos," which means "companion of the Virgin Mary." If he went to England after the crucifixion, she may have done so, too. Did Jesus follow them? In *St. Joseph of Arimathea at Glastonbury*, Lewis quotes an ancient manuscript, "Our Lord Himself dedicated it [*i.e.,* the location of Mary's grave] in honour of His Mother."[7] This quote is usually construed to mean that Jesus made a miraculous post-resurrection appearance, but if he had survived the crucifixion, it could mean that he was present in Britain for the burial of his mother**.

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* A "hide" was an old English measure of land, usually about 120 acres.

** A more common tradition is that Mary went to Ephesus after her son departed and lived out her life in the care of Apostle John. Another tradition says that she stayed in Jerusalem and was entombed nearby in the

In William I's famous land survey of Britain known as the Domesday Book* (A.D. 1088), a surprising title is given to Glastonbury—a place supposedly visited by Christ in his youth. It is called the "Domus Dei ['Home of God'], in the great Monastery of Glastonbury, called the Secret [Secretum] of The Lord." Why was it called this? What was the secret?

Some believe that Joseph of Arimathea had buried the Holy Grail there. This theory does not satisfy everyone, and the question has been asked: was Glastonbury the home of Christ's biggest secret of all—that he survived the crucifixion and retired there with the help of his extended family? As pointed out in *St. Joseph of Arimathea at Glastonbury,* "'Secretum' does not necessarily mean 'secret,' it can also mean 'a place of retirement.'"[8] If this is the true meaning of "Secretum" here, then the Domesday Book is really calling Glastonbury "the Retirement Place of our Lord."

Different versions exist of the English legends. This can partly be explained by the fact that it was common for bones of saints to be moved from one location to another. Legends often arose where the bones found a new home.

Jesus does not have a tomb in England, so if he retired there for a while, he did not necessarily stay. Other traditions suggest that he continued traveling.

Jesus Died in France

A popular Christian legend in Europe is that Mary Magdalene traveled by boat from Palestine to the French coastal town of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer or Marseilles after the crucifixion.

Valley of Cedron. According to legends that seem to have started in the fifth century, Mary's body was physically resurrected and taken to Heaven, an event known as the Assumption. Belief in the Assumption became required of Catholics when Pope Pius XII issued his Papal Bull of November 1, 1950. Some English traditions have Joseph of Arimathea going to England after Mary's death/Assumption. It is also possible that her bones were moved from Ephesus or Cedron to England, or vice versa.

* The Domesday Book was a survey of land ownership and regional resources compiled for taxation purposes. It was humorously called the "Domesday" or "Doomsday" Book because it was a record that all men had to face and from which there was no appeal.

Some say that the oldest-known version of this legend was recorded by Rabanus (A.D. 776-856), but the *Catholic Encyclopedia* claims that it cannot be traced back further than the 11th century. According to the story, Magdalene had company on her trip: Jesus' mother Mary, Mary (wife of Cleophas or Alphaeus), Mary (mother of apostles James and John), Lazarus, Martha, Maximim (one of Jesus' 72 lesser disciples), Trophinnus, Eutrophius, Marcella (Martha's maid), Sara (a black woman), and Joseph of Arimathea.

It is uncertain when this reputed journey took place. Vatican librarian Cardinal Baronius writes in *Ecclesiastical Annals* (1601) that it occurred in A.D. 35. Baronius also cites the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Dexter* which states that the voyage happened around A.D. 48, *i.e.,* about fifteen years after the crucifixion, and Virgin Mary is not included as one of the travelers.

Upon arriving in Gaul, the parties separated so that they could widely preach the gospel. Lazarus settled in Marseilles where he became the first bishop there. According to ancient church records at Lyons, Lazarus had earlier served as Bishop in Cyprus, traveled to Britain for a brief visit, and then served in Marseilles for seven years until his death. He either died from natural causes in A.D. 44 or 45, or from beheading during a wave of persecution under Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96). His body was eventually buried at the Cathedral in Autun, France, but his head remained at Marseilles. He was said to have been a zealous and kindly preacher.

Magdalene may have also lived a short time in England, only to join Maximim at the French city of Aix. An altar at the Church of St. Sauveur in Aix was dedicated to Magdalene and Maximim as the founders of the city. One legend has her raising a child in France, perhaps Christ's daughter. (It was a common belief of French royalty that they were descended from Magdalene).

Another version of the Magdalene-Goes-To-France legend is that she lived in seclusion for thirty years in a cave at La Sainte-Baume. The cave story may have been written before A.D. 100 in a work called *Vita eremitica beatae Mariae Magdalenae* that some people attribute to Josephus, although this authorship is uncertain.

As we saw earlier in this book, Magdalene and Lazarus appear to have been Christ's two closest companions. If they traveled together by sea to France, we might wonder if Jesus was on the

boat with them. The legend of Mary living in a cave could mean that she chose to live in hiding, perhaps with her husband Jesus and/or daughter? Most versions of the legend say that she was there to meditate*.

In *The Tomb of God,* Andrews and Schellenberger theorize that Jesus died in Gaul. They analyze hidden geometry imbedded in various parchments and oil paintings such as *Les Bergers d'Arcadie* (I and II) by Nicolas Poussin (1593-1665). The authors believe that Christ's body might still be resting today under Mount Cardou in southern France not far from the Mediterranean Sea. Nearby is the mysterious village of Rennes-le-Château which is famous as the home of a great secret about Christ. *The Tomb of God* offers three scenarios to explain how the body may have come to rest there:

1. Jesus survived the crucifixion and went to France with Magdalene, who was pregnant with their child. They settled in a region that the Romans used as a place of exile, which made it relatively safe for fugitives. Gaul had numerous gold and silver mines, and Arimathea's connections to the mining industry provided Jesus with helpful contacts. Jesus remained in the region until his death.

2. Jesus died in Palestine, but his body was shipped to the south of France when his family fled there to avoid persecution.

3. Jesus died in Palestine where his bones remained for over a thousand years. When the Knights Templar arrived in Jerusalem to fight the Crusades, they exhumed the skeleton and moved it to France where the Templars were well-established.

At least one important element of the "French Connection" has been called into question by the *Catholic Encyclopedia.* The legend of Lazarus in France may be a case of mistaken identity. A bishop named Lazarus had served in Aix from about A.D. 407 to

* A completely different story from *c.*A.D. 449 says that Magdalene went to Ephesus after the crucifixion to live with Apostle John. Ephesus proved to be a bad choice because she was stoned to death as a martyr. Tourists to that city can still visit a tomb which is said to be hers, although the Greek Church contends that her remains had been transferred to Constantinople. On the other hand, bulls (declarations) issued by three Popes in a row (Lucius III (*r.*1181-1185), Urban III (*r.*1185-1187), and Clement III (*r.*1187)) said that her bones were in France.

411. After being forced to abandon his see, the French Lazarus went to Palestine for a while, and then returned home where he finished his days at Marseilles. Palestine, Aix and Marseilles all figure heavily in the Lazarus-Goes-To-France legend.

Jesus Died in Kashmir

During Christ's era, prominent people were commonly buried in well-marked tombs. If Jesus did not ascend bodily into heaven, then a tomb should have been built for him somewhere.

In the holy city of Srinagar—the summer capital of Kashmir—stands a tomb holding the remains of a man named Yuzu Asaph (a.k.a. Yuz Asaf, Yuzu Asaf, etc.). According to local belief, Yuzu Asaph was a Jewish prophet who had come from another country two thousand years ago preaching in parables like Christ.

The Yuzu Asaph tomb is called "Rozabal" ("site of the honored tomb"). It rests on a foundation of old stone walls which indicates that the original structure was ancient. Inside the tomb is a stone slab containing the chiseled image of two feet, each bearing a wound as though the feet had been crucified with a single nail, the left foot over the right foot. (The Shroud of Turin also suggests a crucifixion victim with his left foot nailed over the right.) The Yusu Asaph engraving depicts two pads that were used to raise the feet so that the victim could walk with less pain. Rozabal can still be visited today. Is it the burial place of Christ?

"Yuzu" is the Persian name for Jesus. It is similar to his Aramaic name of *Jesu* and the Urdu* *Yusu.* "Asaph" is a Hebrew word for "gatherer." In *A Search for the Historical Jesus,* Hassnain quotes a manuscript written by Moslem historian Mulla Nadiri that was discovered in a fifteenth century compilation: "I have found in the ancient Hindu works that Issa [*i.e.,* Jesus], the Spirit of Allah, assumed the name of Yuzu Asaph in Kashmir."[9] During his stint as Director of Archaeology for Jammu and Kashmir, Hassnain also discovered a decree issued in 1766 by the Grand Mufti of Kashmir which says that Yuzu Asaph had arrived in Kashmir during the reign of Raja Gopadatta. Gopadatta ruled over Kashmir from A.D. 49 to 109. This would mean that Jesus arrived in Kashmir (perhaps for the second time in his life) sometime after age 49, *i.e.,* more than a decade after the crucifixion, perhaps in the year A.D. 78.

* Urdu is the official language of Pakistan and is spoken in India.

There is a tomb along Jesus' presumed route to Kashmir that some people believe to be Mary Magdalene's. It stands six miles from the central Asian city of Kashgar. The implication is that she accompanied Christ on his final trip to Asia but died en route. Even mother Mary may have gone on that journey. A tomb called *Mai-Mari-de-Asthan* ("The Resting Place of Mother Mary") lies on the Hill of Murree forty-five miles east of Taxila on the border of Kashmir. Mother Mary's tomb has been a pilgrimage destination for Hindus and Muslims, and it is oriented east-west in the Jewish fashion. It is possible that both Marys had died before Jesus began his trek to Kashmir, and he took their bones with him to place in new tombs closer to his final destination.

What should we make of the Rozabal tomb? We cannot rule out that it was built as a tourist trap to lure pilgrims and their money. Kashmir was (and still is) too remote to attract many visitors on its own charms. After all, is it conceivable that Jesus would have gone to such a place after his crucifixion?

As mentioned in chapter 12, many Jews had traveled to the Far East and settled there, including to Kashmir. If Christ had visited the region during his Missing Years, he may have sought his final refuge there since it was familiar territory and well outside the boundaries of the Roman Empire. Non-Biblical traditions suggest that he did exactly that:

1. The apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* reflects a popular belief that Apostle Thomas went to India after the crucifixion and the resurrected Jesus appeared to him there. This story could simply mean that Christ accompanied or joined Thomas in Asia.

2. In the ninth book of the Hindu *Purana*, King Shalivahana meets a Christ-like man near Srinagar in the Himalayas decades after the crucifixion. The holy man is fair-skinned, wears white garments, and says that he is a son of God, born of a virgin, minister to the nonbelievers, and relentless in search of the truth. When the king asks the man his religion, the stranger replies that he came from a foreign country where truth no longer existed and evil knew no bounds. He adds that he is called Isa-Masih. (See v. 16-33, 3rd khanda, Pratisarga parvan of the *Bhavishya Mahapurana*.) The book in which this passage appears may have been compiled in A.D. 115, which would place it close in time to the event.

3. In 912, Persian Muslim author Shaikh Said us Sadiq wrote his book *Kamal-ud-Din* in which he tells of Yuzu Asaph traveling through many cities before reaching Kashmir where he eventually died. Yuzu preached in parables that were similar to those of the New Testament. Just before his death, Asaph asked a disciple to build a tomb where he died. He pointed his legs towards the west and head towards the east, and left his body.

4. Mulla Nadiri's fifteenth century history entitled *Tarihk-i-Kashmir* states that Yuzu Asaph preached in Palestine in A.D. 78 and was considered the Prophet of Israel. He later went to Kashmir where he took the name Yuzu Asaph and continued preaching there. That is where he eventually died. Some of this information was gleaned from ancient Kashmiri ruins adorned with inscriptions about Yuzu. The inscriptions were confirmed in the sixteenth century by Mirza Haider Malik Chaudra, and by other people at other times.

5. In 1417, a Persian work called the *Rauzat-us-Safa* by Mir Muhammad Bin Khawand (pub. 1852) said that Jesus was a great traveler who wore a woolen scarf and cloak. He wandered by foot from country to country and city to city. Jesus was eventually arrested in Hasibain along with a few disciples, but the king became a follower after Christ performed some healings and other miracles.

6. According to the *Koran* 23:50, God provided Jesus and his mother with a place to live after the crucifixion. That place is described as a "shelter on lofty meadows," which could mean the mountains of Kashmir.

7. The High Court in Kashmir issued a decree in 1774 pronouncing that Yuz Asaph had gone there and spent his time praying and meditating. He was buried at Rozabal where a person named Imam Musa-Raza was also later interred.

Other works from centuries past mention the traditions of Yuz Asaf in Kashmir, such as the Buddhist *Book of Balauhar and Budasaf*, the Urdu *Qisa Shazada Yuzasaph wo hakim Balauhar*, the Persian *Bagh-i-Sulaiman* (1780, which says that the tomb in Kashmir was famous), the *Wajees-ut-Tawarikh* (compiled 1857), an ancient Chinese document called *The History of Religion and Doctrines – The Glass Mirror*, and *Tarikh-I-Kabir Kashmire* (pub. 1902).

Even Mandaeans have a story: Jesus went to Asia after the crucifixion using Thomas' name. He continued to preach wherever he could and wound up in Madras where he was burned to death by Hindu priests.

If Jesus' bones lie today at Rozabal, then the apocalyptic hopes of a great many Muslims and Christians are destroyed. True believers are taught that Jesus was taken physically to heaven, and he will return in the same body at his Second Coming. If his body is nothing but a collection of decayed bones in the Himalayas, then only a more spiritual interpretation of Christ's Second Coming will work: he shed his earthly coil two thousand years ago and will return in a "divine" or "radiant body," or he will reincarnate into a different human body.

Not everyone believes that Yuzu Asaph was Christ. In *Karikh-i-Hassan* (1891), Pirzada Ghulam Hasan notes an old Kashmiri inscription that says "Yuz Asaf" came from Egypt in A.D. 54 claiming only to be a descendant of a prophet. (This does not rule out Jesus, who could have traveled through Egypt on his way to Kashmir). In 1903, the book *Tarikh-i-Kabir-i-Kashmire* cites an earlier tome suggesting that "Yuz Asaf" was a prince from Sri Lanka who died in Kashmir. It has even been theorized that Yuzu Asaph was an Essene whose teachings closely resembled those of Christ.

Jesus Died in Japan

As mentioned in chapter 3, Japan competes with Kashmir as the site of Christ's burial place. Tourists can visit Jesus' alleged grave at the village of Shingo (formerly Herai) in northern Japan. The grave was "discovered" in 1935 by Shinto priest Koma Takenouchi who reportedly came into possession of ancient documents pertaining to two small graves located on the ancestral land of the Sawaguchi family in Shingo. The original scrolls are said to have contained Jesus' last will and testament, but it is really an autobiography of his travels.

According to the Japanes scrolls, Jesus went to Japan at age 21 during his Missing Years, studied religion and culture for a over a decade with a distinguished Japanese priest near Mount Fuji, and then returned to preach in his homeland. Although Christ was sentenced to die by crucifixion, he escaped because his younger brother Isukiri took his place. Jesus fled to Siberia where he lived for four

years. From there he traveled north to Alaska and took a boat to Hachinohe, Japan. Jesus changed his name to the Japanese Kaitenku Taro Jurai and settled in the Shingo rice fields where he was known as the "long-nosed goblin." He married a Japanese woman named Miyuko, had three daughters, invented the Japanese phonetic alphabet (katakana), and finally died at the age of 106. He was buried at Shingo where his grave can still be visited today. The grave next to his contains one or both ears of his martyred brother Isukiri and a lock of hair from mother Mary. Another version of the legend says that Isukiri's entire body is buried there.

Unfortunately for the credibility of the Shingo graves, there is no way to authenticate the original scrolls since they were supposedly lost during World War II. Only the "recopied" text is available for view at a small museum located near the grave. The original discovery was made during a nationalistic era when a similar "discovery" was announced concerning an alleged trip of Moses to Japan where the emperor gave him the Ten Commandments, the Hebrew language, and the Star of David symbol.

Although the Jesus documents at Shingo are widely regarded as complete hoaxes, some people believe that Jesus may have been to the region as evidenced by some unusual customs that are practiced by Shingo natives but which are unknown elsewhere in Japan. Until recently, newborn children were marked with a black cross on the forehead. A village chant that is meaningless in Japanese supposedly comes from an ancient Hebrew song. When the first word of the song ("Na-Nee-Ya") is decoded, it may mean "Yehova gave a child—Me." Even the town's former name, Herai, is said to come from the word "Hebrew." If Jesus had wanted to forever hide himself from the Roman world, he could have hardly chosen a better place than Shingo.

Jesus Died at Masada

The crucifixion did nothing to ease the tensions between Jews and Rome. Militant Zealots helped foment a rebellion known as the Jewish War that started in A.D. 66 and raged for seven years. The conflict ended when the Zealot's mountaintop stronghold at Masada fell to Roman pressure. Rather than allow the Romans to take them prisoner, all 960 inhabitants of Masada (except two women and five children) agreed to be slain by ten Zealot soldiers in an act of mass-suicide.

Did Jesus survive the crucifixion only to join the Zealots and die at Masada? As discussed in chapter 7, he may have attracted one or two Zealots to his circle. If he survived the crucifixion, it is certainly possible that he elected to join the group.

A few theorists have suggested that all of the Zealots at Masada were Christ's followers. The leader at Masada was Eleazar Ben Jair. Eleazar was a common Jewish name, but according to *Holy Blood, Holy Grail,* "Eleazar" is a variation of "Lazarus," and this could mean that "Eleazar" was Christ's companion Lazarus.

Jewish historian Josephus provides rare insight into the events at Masada because he interviewed the survivors. He was told that Eleazar had inspired everyone to accept the mass-suicide plan by saying that it was better to die honorably than to wind up tortured and in slavery. Eleazar also preached a surprising Essene/Gnostic-like message:

> ...it is life that is a calamity to men, and not death; for this last affords our souls their liberty, and sends them by a removal into their own place of purity, where they are to be insensible to all sorts of misery; for while souls are tied down to a mortal body, they are partakers of its miseries; and really, to speak the truth, they are themselves dead; for the union of what is divine to what is mortal is disagreeable. It is true, the power of the soul is great, even when it is imprisoned in a mortal body; for by moving it after a way that is invisible, it makes the body a sensible instrument, and causes it to advance further in its actions than mortal nature could otherwise do. However, when it is freed from that weight which draws it down to the earth, and is connected with it, it obtains its own proper place, and does then become a partaker of that blessed power, and those abilities, which are then every way incapable of being hindered in their operations....[L]et us regard those Indians who profess the exercise of philosophy...so firmly and certainly do they believe that souls converse with one another (in the other world).[10]

These words would have been unusual for a typical Jew, but not necessarily for a follower of Christ if Jesus was an Essene and/or a Gnostic who had studied in India as discussed in previous chapters. However, Eleazar's words were deceptive because he failed

to mention a common belief of Gnostics and Indian philosophers that discouraged suicide: if someone dies before achieving spiritual liberation, then the soul can expect problems after death. Suicide does not provide liberation.

In *The Jesus Scroll,* author Donovan Joyce claims that he was shown an ancient scroll allegedly discovered in 1964 at the Masada site. The document was supposedly written the night before the mass-suicide by a man who identified himself as "Jesus of Gennesareth" (*i.e.,* "Jesus of Nazareth") who was the true heir to the Jewish throne. If the scroll was genuine, it would have been powerful evidence that Christ was at Masada three decades after the crucifixion. However, Joyce's story about how he came to view the scroll contains too many cloak-and-dagger elements to be taken seriously. No trace of such a scroll has ever surfaced anywhere in the world, and so its existence has never been verified.

After all is said and done, it is of course possible that Jesus died on the cross. His lack of sleep, horrible torture at the hands of the Romans, dragging the heavy cross through a section of Jerusalem, refusing the painkiller offered by his executioners, and being emotionally exhausted could have contributed to a fast demise when the nails were finally driven into his extremities. If he was stabbed with a spear as reported in *John* 19:34 (but in no other Gospel), the sudden flow of blood and water from the wound may have been a sign that his heart had been punctured: the water came from the sac surrounding the heart, and the blood from inside.

A fifth-century compilation of early Jewish traditions called the *Toledeth Jesu* offers another explanation why Jesus' followers found an empty tomb. A gardener named Juda learned of a plot by the disciples to steal Christ's body, so he buried the corpse in a new grave that he dug, and this caused Jesus' followers to discover an empty tomb. Juda later dug up the body and sold it to some Jewish leaders who dragged it through the streets of Jerusalem. Most Jewish scholars today doubt the reliability of *Toledeth Jesu.*

What happened to Christ after the nails were pounded into his hands and feet? This is one of the most intriguing questions about his life. To many Christians, it is the all-important question, and it demands a single answer: Jesus died and was miraculously resurrected; but if this did not happen, then there is no spiritual

salvation available to humanity. Many spiritually-oriented people outside Christianity (and even a few within) see this as a limiting perspective. Religious thinkers were grappling with the complex issue of the soul and its liberation for millennia before Christ, and they continue to do so today. If Christ did not die in the manner preached by Paul, the inquiry into spiritual recovery has not ended.

Confession

Orion glanced at his watch and saw that it was two p.m. Lunch with Bernie was going well, but he needed to complete his business with Joe.

"My friend," Orion said to the producer as he stood up, "Joe and I need to work up a contract before traffic gets too heavy. He flies back to the Big Apple tomorrow."

"Understood," Bernie assented. "I like your boy. I'll try to work him into the deal with World Unicom."

"Pleasure meeting you," Orion said to the reps.

They flashed smiles of pained tolerance.

Orion steered his car down a twisted Malibu Hills road. He marveled over the fact that world-wise Bernie had accepted Joe as Christ without any hesitation, as though the entire scenario was normal and expected. Was Orion missing something obvious?

He pushed a button on the car's speakerphone and dialed the office.

"GTA," Sandy answered.

"Sandy, this is Ryan. Joe and I are on the way. Have a contract ready, would you?"

"Boss!" Sandy sounded anxious. "Take my advice and don't come near this place. It's a zoo. There are so many camera crews outside that the police have closed off the street...Hold on."

Sandy could be heard barking at someone, "No! I told you! He won't be here! We'll notify you...OK, suit yourself, but you're wasting your time.

"OK, Boss, I'm back."

"You're right, Sandy. I'll take Joe to the house and ink him there. Why don't you and everybody just close shop? Nothing's going to get done with all that commotion. Have a good weekend."

"Thanks, boss. You, too."

Orion turned to his passenger. "For such a nice guy, you sure do stir up a lot of trouble. Who are you? The devil in disguise?"

"Ah, my dark side," Joe smiled back. "Do not probe too deeply, or your illusions might be shattered."

"Don't worry. I think that even the best of us are just a bunch of schlemiels trying to muddle through life somehow. But listen, if there's something I need to know about you, then spill the beans now. I don't want any nasty surprises later."

For the first time since Joe's arrival, Orion saw him become utterly serious. Was a tear welling in his eye?

Joe breathed deeply and stared at the floor. "Perhaps I have some things to atone for myself."

Chapter 19

Jesus: The Con Artist

Was Jesus a calculating con artist who perpetrated history's most influential hoax?

Jesus is quoted as saying, "Each tree is recognized by its own fruit...The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart." (*Luke* 6:44-45, NIV). If we apply these words to Christ himself, what conclusions can we draw?

Some critics contend that Christianity has been the most devastating religion ever created. The centuries are witness to millions of people dying at the hands of Christian crusaders, Inquisitors, and zealots. Slavery in America was justified by Christian dogma. The world has still not recovered from the extraordinary intellectual cloud brought on by the Catholic Inquisition centuries ago. Christians are responsible for the wholesale destruction of irreplaceable historical and spiritual records. All the while, hypocrisy seems to run rampant. Christian fundamentalists are often staunch supporters of high military budgets that lead to terrible human slaughter, but they promote Christianity as a religion of peace. Many Christians loudly condemn various forms of sexual conduct while the media feed us with lurid sex scandals involving Catholic priests and fundamentalist preachers. Some Christian "Reconstructionists" and "Dominionists" with surprising influence in American politics advocate a return to literal Old Testament law including legalization of slavery, death by stoning, and forceful eradication of all contrary religion. It has been argued that Christianity attracts people with promises of love and fellowship, but then it quietly turns many of its believers into merchants of hypocrisy, intolerance, and division.

Are the apparent evils of Christianity a reflection of its founder?

According to the New Testament gospels, many people who knew Jesus personally were disturbed by his behavior. Even his own family thought that he was mentally unbalanced:

> Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."
>
> *Mark* 3:20-21 (NIV)

Jesus claimed to receive communications from God, but that only reinforced his negative image: "At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, 'He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?'" (*John* 10:19-20, NIV)

Today we see clever bumper stickers that say, "Know Christ, Know Peace. No Christ, No Peace." Christians also seem to claim a monopoly on "family values." But words attributed to Christ preach the opposite:

> You must not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man will find his enemies under his own roof. No one is worthy of me who cares more for father or mother than for me; no one is worthy of me who cares more for son or daughter; no one is worthy of me who does not take up his cross and follow me.
>
> *Matthew* 10:34-38 (REB)

Luke 14:26 affirms this anti-family message by quoting Jesus, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine." (REB).

Hate your own children? Hate your own life? What kind of bizarre philosophy is that? Even the otherwise benign Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* quotes Jesus:

> Perhaps people think that I have come to impose peace upon the world. They do not know that I have come to impose conflicts upon the earth: fire, sword, war. For there will be five in a house: There will be three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father, and they will stand alone.[1]

To make matters worse, Christ seemed to have a split personality. One day he ranted that we must hate our families, and on another day he said the opposite:

> 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.' But you say that whoever tells his father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God," then that person need not honor the father. So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. You hypocrites!
>
> *Matthew* 15:4-7 (NRSV)

Some sayings of Jesus appear to have an earlier origin than the gospels, and many scholars do not believe that all sayings in the Bible are authentic. Efforts have been made to determine Jesus' true words by extracting a "Q Gospel" ("Source Gospel") from the New Testament. The Q Gospel comes in three layers: Q^1 contains the most fundamental teachings which are likeliest to be those of Christ. Q^2 adds what many scholars believe to be Christ's later teachings or those of other Christians. Q^3 contains statements that are least likely to be Christ's. When we look at Q^1, the anti-family statement is still there:

> Whoever does not hate his father and mother will not be able to learn from me. Whoever does not hate his son and daughter cannot belong to my school.[2]

If we are to believe two apocryphal gospels, Jesus' antisocial traits were evident when he was only five or six years old. *The Infancy of Jesus Christ* (*c.*2nd century) tells of Jesus making a little fishing pool that was destroyed by another boy. Jesus did not hesitate to kill the child for his crime: "In like manner as this water has vanished, so shall thy life vanish; and presently the boy died."[3] Merely bumping into the young Christ was grounds for death:

> Another time, when the Lord Jesus was coming home in the evening with [father] Joseph, he met a boy, who ran so hard against him, that he threw him down;

To whom the Lord Jesus said, As thou has thrown me down, so shalt thou fall, nor ever rise.

And that moment the boy fell down and died.[4]

On another occasion, Jesus was on a rooftop with a young boy who fell and was killed. The townspeople accused Christ of murder, but he defended himself with the implausible statement that his companion had thrown himself off the roof.

Parents in town became so upset by the deaths of their children that they complained to Christ's father, "Because you have such a boy, you can't live with us in the village, or else teach him to bless and not curse. He's killing our children!"[5] Joseph took his son aside and demanded, "Why are you doing all this? These people are suffering and so they hate and harass us."[6] Jesus showed no remorse, but instead he reportedly caused his accusers to become blind. Father Joseph had to tell Mary to keep the boy in the house: "Don't let him go outside, because those who annoy him end up dead."[7]

With the advent of modern psychiatry over a century ago, "Historical Psychiatry" came into vogue, and Jesus was a popular subject for assessment. His psychiatric profiles are usually based on the New Testament gospels and the premise that his miracles were not real phenomena. Albert Schweitzer summarizes some of the diagnoses that were made of Christ around the turn of the 20th century. In *The Dementia of Jesus*, Charles Binet-Sanglé concludes that Jesus suffered from delusions that appeared abruptly and without previous reflection. In contrast, William Hirsch's *Conclusions of a Psychiatrist* said that Christ's delusions began to form gradually in boyhood and were intensified by reading the Jewish Scriptures. George de Loosten *(Jesus Christ from the Standpoint of the Psychiatrist)* constructs a similar psychiatric model by suggesting that Jesus was the product of poor heredity who attracted attention because of his high intelligence and an exaggerated self-consciousness that blossomed into a fixed delusional system influenced by the religious ideas of his day. Perhaps he also suffered manic-depressive disorder that caused mood swings and bizarre behavior—one day his mind was calm and clear, another day he might be found cursing a fig tree.

Others have interpreted Christ's mental state in a less severe, but still unflattering, way. He was simply caught up in the overexcitement of a shared religious delusion:

> Jesus was determined to be crucified, and thus he sent Judas to betray the secret that he was the Messiah. He was crucified, but only to discover while dying in agony that he had been wrong. He was not the Messiah. He would die, and God did not care. Observing his beloved teacher dead on the cross, Judas realized that all had been in vain. The pain became unbearable and he hanged himself.[8]

Did Jesus really believe he was the Messiah? Or was he an unrepentant con artist who went to extraordinary lengths to make people believe that he was the promised Redeemer?

Christian orthodoxy rests on a belief that Jesus performed miracles. One of them was his own resurrection. Were his miracles transparent hoaxes?

In the mid-1960's, a best-selling nonfiction book was published entitled *The Passover Plot* by Dr. Hugh J. Schonfield. It theorized that Jesus had deliberately manipulated events so that he would be crucified and removed from the cross before dying:

> A conspiracy had to be organized of which the victim was himself the secret instigator. It was a nightmarish conception and undertaking, the outcome of the frightening logic of a sick mind, or a genius. And it worked out.[9]

Schonfield suggests this *Mission: Impossible* scenario:

Jesus believed that he needed to be crucified and survive in order to be accepted as the Messiah. In a carefully conceived plot involving two or three of his closest friends, Christ took a calculated gamble with his life. He manipulated events so that he would be arrested, crucified, and removed from the cross before death. Two people figured heavily into the plan: Judas Iscariot would contact the authorities at the proper moment under the guise of "betraying" Christ, and Joseph of Arimathea would use his influence to ensure that Christ's body was quickly removed from the cross.

In order for the plan to work, it was vital to convince Pilate that Jesus had died after just a few hours on the cross. The conspirators had one thing going for them: the Jews objected to leaving crucifixion victims hanging overnight, especially into the Passover, and so the Romans broke the legs of their victims. This caused a weight shift leading to quick suffocation and death. For the Passover Plot to work, Jesus had to be arrested on the Sabbath and quickly appear dead on the cross so that his legs would not be broken. The plotters were successful. The Roman soldiers did not crush Christ's legs as they did to nearby victims. (See *John* 19:33). Meanwhile, according to the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, Joseph of Arimathea had already asked Pilate *before* the crucifixion to receive the body after death. This means that Christ's rapid release from the cross had been prearranged.

The conspirators were able to make Jesus seem dead because of a drug they administered to him while he hung on the cross. Three New Testament gospels report that someone standing by the crucifix dipped a sponge into white vinegar, put it on a stick, and raised it to Jesus' mouth so that he could drink it. (*Matthew* 27:48, *Mark* 15:36, and *John* 19:28). According to Shonfield, such refreshment would normally revive a crucifixion victim, but in Jesus' case it had the opposite effect: he suddenly seemed to die. This indicates that a drug was mixed with the vinegar, and it caused Jesus to become unconscious. It is unusual that someone even administered a drink to him, and *The NIV Study Bible* suggests that this act "may indicate forethought..."[10] According to *Mark* 15:23, Christ's executioners had offered him wine mixed with myrrh before they hammered in the nails, but he refused. Myrrh with wine was used to deaden pain, but it did not typically cause unconsciousness. Maybe Jesus knew that an accomplice would be giving him another drug later, such as haoma and tetrodotoxin which were used by the Zoroastrians and will produce a simulacrum of death. Other theorists have suggested that other drugs may have been used.

Schonfield believes that the Passover Plot actually failed because Jesus must have died from the spear wound reported in *John* 19:34. The New Testament gospels indicate that the "resurrected Christ" was not immediately recognized by his friends or family, which could mean that the conspirators used someone to

impersonate him. However, as we saw in chapter 18, there are multiple legends that Jesus survived the crucifixion, and this would mean that a Passover Plot—if it existed—was a remarkable success. Perhaps Jesus was not stabbed with a spear after all, or if he was, he did not die from it.

Schonfield was not the first to speculate about a Passover Plot. Two centuries earlier, German clergyman Karl Friedrich Bahrdt (1741-1792) wrote a series entitled "Popular Letters about the Bible." His scenario is summarized in Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus:*

Christ had the support of two influential Essenes: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The Essenes were a secret society that attracted members from all social ranks, including from within the Sanhedrin. A small cabal of Essene leaders hatched a complicated plot to create a "Jewish Messiah." They chose baby Jesus for the role and groomed him as he grew up. Luke the physician (and gospel author) instructed Jesus in the healing arts. When Christ was finally grown, his Essene sponsors wanted him to participate in a series of stage-managed "miracles." Jesus initially refused, but he changed his mind after being persuaded that the motives were lofty and that Moses had gone along with a similar plan centuries earlier. The Twelve Apostles were not aware of the plot, and so they believed in the truth of the miracles. The crucifixion was real but carefully stage-managed: Essenes in the Sanhedrin caused Christ to be arrested, placed immediately on the cross, and then removed. Luke made sure that Jesus was given powerful drugs to dull the pain and ensure survival. Days later, despite his wounds, Jesus was well enough to walk and announce his "resurrection." He lived out the rest of his days in retirement at an Essene enclave.

Another variation of the story was proposed a short time later by Karl Heinrich Venturini (*b.*1768). Jesus and John the Baptist were both educated Essenes, but by age thirty, Christ's spiritual progress had caused him to outgrow their aims. He was nevertheless persuaded by some Essenes to cooperate with their Messiah scenario. Jesus did not intend to be crucified, but after being removed from the cross, he was cared for by his Essene brethren.

If there was a Passover Plot, it may have worked because Jesus was more diabolically clever than even Schonfield, Bahrdt,

and Venturini gave him credit for. In the Gnostic *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth,* Jesus and a group of Gnostics are engaged in a dialogue after the crucifixion. Christ informs them that he was not crucified because a man named Simon had been put in his place:

> For my death which they think happened, happened to them in their error and blindness, since they nailed their man unto their death...It was another, their father, who drank the gall and the vinegar, it was not I. They struck me with the reed; it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. It was another upon whom they placed the crown of thorns...And I was laughing at their ignorance.*[11]

This passage is disturbing because it paints Jesus as a psychopath. He expressed no sympathy for an innocent man who may have died a horrible death in his place. Christ only felt self-centered glee at outwitting his rivals.

The Body Switch idea was already being expressed *c.*A.D. 120-130 by Alexandrian writer Basilides. He said that the crucifixion was a fraud because Simon of Cyrene was nailed in Jesus' place. Centuries later, the *Koran* seemed to echo the theme in verse 4:157:

> They [*i.e.,* the Jews] denied the truth and uttered a monstrous falsehood against Mary. They declared: 'We have put to death the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah.' They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did."[12]

The Body Switch Theory may have been inspired by the New Testament. *Luke* 23:26 tells what happened when Jesus was paraded toward the crucifixion site: "As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus." (NRSV). *Mark* 15:21 adds the detail: "They compelled a passerby, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus."* (NRSV). *Matthew* 27:32 repeats the information about Simon carrying the cross, while *John* 19:17 states that Jesus carried the crucifix himself.

If Simon carried the cross and Jesus was seen alive after the crucifixion, it is certainly possible that the wrong man was executed. Was such a switch preplanned, perhaps with Simon as a co-conspirator? As everyone trudged toward Golgotha, a moment may have presented itself when the crown of thorns and Jesus' outer clothing could have been quickly transferred to Simon as he carried the cross and Jesus was whisked into the crowd using the escape techniques of the *Sicarii.* A distraction might have been staged to momentarily take the Roman guards' attention off Christ when the switch was made. Simon may have thought that the soldiers would not carry out the execution when they learned of Christ's escape, but Simon was nailed anyway. Another possibility is that Simon had no prior involvement with Jesus, and his impromptu recruitment presented a lucky opportunity for Jesus to flee**.

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* Jesus was laughing at ignorance of the evil spiritual entities ("Archons") who, according to Gnostic belief, perpetuate the evils of the universe. *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* reflects an idea held by some Gnostic Christians that Archons were behind the effort to get Jesus crucified.

* Cyrene was the capital of Cyrenia, a Roman possession on the north coast of Africa where Libya is today. Cyrene had a large population of Greek-speaking Jews, and Bible scholars assume that Simon was in Jerusalem for the Passover. *Mark* mentions that Simon was the father of two sons named Alexander and Rufus, and *Mark* does so in a way to indicate that the two sons were personally acquainted with *Mark's* author. This Rufus might be the same Rufus described by Paul as a devout Christian whose mother "has been a mother to me, too." (*Romans* 16:13, NIV). Paul does not mention Rufus having a father when Paul knew the family, which would have been well after the crucifixion. Was this because Rufus' father had died on the cross in Jesus' place, or perhaps sometime afterwards? Did Paul befriend this family because of Simon's involvement in the Passion events? These are interesting questions without firm answers.

** Other Body Switch victims have been proposed such as Judas Iscariot and Apostle Thomas. Thomas' name in Aramaic (*Te'oma*) and in Greek (Didymos) each means "twin." *John* 11:16 claims that he is "Thomas, called the Twin." The opening words to the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas* have caused some people to believe that Thomas was Jesus' biological twin. Others have guessed that Thomas was called "the twin" because of a resemblance to Christ, or he was someone else's twin. Mandaeans believe that it was Thomas who died on the cross, and Jesus used that name afterwards.

If Jesus had survived the crucifixion, his brush with death did not seem to mellow his personality. The apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* reports that Thomas did not want to go to Asia as an evangelist despite encouragement from the other Apostles and a nighttime visit from the resurrected Christ. Jesus therefore played a trick on him by selling him into slavery to an Indian merchant who took Thomas to the East.

So far in this chapter, we have painted Christ in the worst possible light. However, people and circumstances are rarely as black and white as they seem.

It is true that Christianity has provoked horrible destruction and cruelty, but it has also inspired great art and extraordinary acts of compassion. Even if it is argued that early Christians may have martyred themselves needlessly for a mistaken spiritual cause, their examples of dying for their beliefs are vivid testaments to the importance of spiritual integrity. Weekly church services provide a regular reminder that we need to consider the spiritual side of life, and many preachers offer enriching sermons. Christianity has always been a collection of sects and denominations that can be as different as night and day. If Jesus is to be blamed for the bad in Christianity, then he must also be credited for the good.

As for Jesus himself, much can be said in his defense.

His compassionate teachings far outnumber the divisive ones. His famous Sermon on the Mount praises those who bring peace: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (*Matthew* 5:9, NRSV). He preached the Golden Rule as one of his most important principles.

As for Jesus' alleged behavior as a child, the infancy gospels are largely ignored by scholars because they report improbable events that were clearly invented, such as Jesus making clay birds that flew away. (If anything like that happened, then it was a little boy throwing clay objects in the air.) The infancy gospels also contain more stories about Jesus healing other children than hurting them, and in the case of the child who fell off the roof, Jesus is said to have brought him back to life. The orthodox gospels never report Christ using his abilities in adulthood to injure or punish anyone; he used them only for healing. It is only after his Ascension that miraculous punishments occur in New Testament stories,

and they are committed by apostles such as Paul and Peter. (See, *e.g., Acts* 5:1-11, 13:11, 19:13-18). In an episode of a woman who was to be stoned as an adulteress (*John* 8:3-11), Jesus' humane handling of the situation was brilliant*.

Even the traditions of Simon being switched for Jesus on the cross would not necessarily put Christ in a bad light. Simon would have survived for the same reasons as Jesus: the legs were not broken and the body was removed quickly. If Jesus was able to feel glee at fooling his adversaries, it may have been because Simon survived as well**.

As for the historical psychiatry performed on Christ, it can be disregarded. The New Testament gospels are, at best, second and third-hand accounts authored and edited by people who had a religious agenda. Making a psychiatric diagnosis on the basis of such information would constitute malpractice today.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence that Jesus was a compassionate man with a benign spiritual message is the combination of the *Q Gospel* (especially Q^1) with the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas.* Q^1 extracts the New Testament sayings that are most likely to have been his, and *Thomas* is the apocryphal writing most likely to contain authentic sayings of Jesus. When read together, Q^1 and *Thomas* offer a remarkably sane, compassionate and sensible set of teachings that are devoid of the harsh dogma found elsewhere throughout the New Testament.

Then how do we explain the anti-family statement in Q^1 and the similar pronouncement in *Thomas*?

One way is to appreciate that Jesus' followers were a tiny and maligned sect at the time. Many of them were undoubtedly rebuked by their families. According to the gospels, Christ's own family had declared him insane and tried to seize him. All of this may have caused Jesus to become cynical about family loyalty and to adopt a fatalistic attitude that his teachings would inevitably bring

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* *The NIV Study Bible* points out that the earliest and most reliable versions of *John* do not contain this story, and neither do the other gospels. It is a favorite with many Christians, and so it is found in most Bibles.

** In the Philippines today, some men have themselves crucified like Jesus as part of an annual religious celebration. Although this is extremely painful and damaging to the body, the men survive it.

strife—not because he intended them to, but because that was the unavoidable consequence of religious innovation in that time and place.

It is also possible that Jesus never said those things at all. Even though the anti-family statement is included in Q^1, it is not necessarily authentic. In *The Joy of Sects,* Peter Occhiogrosso explains why the creators of the *Q Gospel* decided that Jesus' anti-family declaration should be included:

> ...in the hierarchy of Jesus' authentic sayings established by biblical scholars, these [*i.e.,* the anti-family statements] rank very high because of what is known as the 'embarrassment factor': potentially embarrassing or inexplicable sayings are likely to have been preserved only because of a very strong tradition that they were actually spoken by Jesus."[14]

That is not a strong basis for inclusion, especially when we consider that the statements may have been written in a mistaken effort to make Jesus seem even more like the Jewish Messiah. When the anti-family statement is mentioned in *Matthew* 10:35-36, Christ is said to be quoting the Old Testament prediction of prophet Micah (*c.*750-686 B.C.). *Micah* 7:6 describes what the Last Days will be like when the future Messiah appears: the world will have serious social problems, including feuding families. *Micah* 7:6 does not say that the Messiah will *cause* family members to turn against one another; it says that family strife is a social ill that will characterize Jewish society before God's Judgment Day. This means that *Matthew* may have put words into Christ's mouth that he did not say.

Another possibility is that the anti-family and pro-war statements are mistranslations.

In *Luke* 14:26, the passage stating that followers must "hate" their families is based on the Greek word *miséó (Strong's #3404).* This word can indeed mean "detest" or "hate," but it also means to simply "love less." It is more likely that the passage really means that people must love the path to spiritual salvation more than family, but they can still love family. This is borne out by *Matthew* 10:37-38 in which Jesus clearly says that followers must love him (as the bringer of salvation) *more* than family; *i.e.,* followers must

choose spiritual liberation even above family, but Christ still intends that people love their families. In *Matthew* 10:34-37 where Jesus talks about bringing a sword to the world and not peace, we may be looking at one of the most grievously mistranslated passages of all. The Greek words identified by *Strong's* can give us the following meaning:

> Never *(#3361)* suppose *(#3543)* that *(#3754)* [I] come *(#2064)* [to] cast out *(#906)* peace *(#1515)* [from] among *(#1909)* [the] lands *(#1093);* never *(#3756)* [do I] come *(#2064)* [to] cast out *(#906)* peace *(#1515)* notwithstanding *(#235)* [the] sword *(#3162).* [I] come *(#2064)* because [of] *(#1063)* alienation [between] *(#1369)* a man *(#444)* against *(#2596)* the father *(#3962)*...[etc.].[Jesus then goes on to say that followers must nevertheless love him more than the love of family].

The Bible reports that some or all of Jesus' Apostles carried swords. (*Matthew* 26:51-52, *Mark* 14:47, *Luke* 9-50, *John* 18:10-11). A better translation of the above passage might therefore be, "Do not suppose that I have come to cast out peace from among the lands just because you see me [or my disciples] carrying swords." This translation, or something very close to it, makes a great deal more sense in light of Jesus' other statements in the same gospel about blessing the peacemakers (5:9) and that people who draw a sword will die by a sword (26:52). In other words, Christ wanted to end the alienation between people, not increase it.

What about the evidence of a Passover Plot?

Leaders are inevitably influenced by their followers to varying degrees. There is no reason to think that Jesus was an exception. The progression of the *Q Gospel* from Q^1 to Q^2 suggests that he did not initially preach an apocalypse but added it later. This seems to be confirmed in the New Testament gospels when he first tells his disciples not to call him the Messiah, but then allows it later and even does so himself in private. If there was a Passover Plot, there is a good chance that it was someone else's brainchild.

What if Christ had hoaxed some of his miracles, including the resurrection? Is it possible that his intentions were good? Jesus may have been wise when he proclaimed, "Unless you see signs

and wonders you will not believe." (*John* 4:48, NRSV). Jesus clearly had a spiritual message, and he wanted to draw people into his ministry. He may have felt a need to connect his teachings to miracles, even if those miracles were faked. The greatest of these—his own resurrection—could have been an allegory to teach us that we all survive death because we are souls. There is, however, a downside to any honorable hoax:

A hoax is ultimately a lie, and a lie—no matter how noble its intent—is a weak foundation on which to sustain spiritual truth. Humanity is in desperate need of maturing spiritually, and many activities that may have been appropriate for religions in the past are no longer viable today. Religions must mature just as individuals must do if they are to succeed in their mission of bringing salvation to humanity.

The overall evidence weighs in favor of a Jesus who was well-intended and had a message of peace. We seem to be faced with a man who was complex in many ways, but the translations of his teachings and the "spins" given to his life did not capture that complexity accurately. The result is a theology that appears to be hit-and-miss: sometimes it makes sense, but at other times it does not. Sorting it out is difficult, but until that is accomplished, we are unlikely to see a unified Christianity.

Freeway Sighting

Interstate 405 was gridlocked when Orion entered to go north.

"I had better call Serena," he said to Joe. "I want to be sure that the coast is clear at the house, otherwise I'll have to hide you in the trunk to sneek you by the news hounds."

Orion dialed home.

"Hi, sweetheart," he said. "Yeah, he's with me...Hon, news crews are showing up at the office so we're heading home to do the contract...Wonderful...I'll ask Joe to spend the night in the guest-room. He got into a bit of trouble last night and I don't want a repeat...We'll both take him to LAX tomorrow...Love ya."

Orion disconnected and turned to Joe. "Serena will be out this evening and all's quiet at the house. We can finish business there and have a bite to eat. This time I want you to stay at the house. No excuses. We'll drive you to the airport tomorrow."

"This time I will accept your offer."

As they drove, a billboard caught Orion's eye. It was an advertisement for reruns of the *The X-Files*—a television series about American FBI agents who pursue supernatural crimes. The billboard's artwork depicted a UFO hovering behind the two main characters of the show.

"Now, there's a question you're sure to be to be asked," Orion mused. "Are we the only planet with intelligent life? Are we being visited by aliens? If you're the Son of God, then you would know."

"Do you think those questions are important to my mission?"

"I don't know. Maybe?"

Chapter 20

Jesus: The Ancient Astronaut

Strange disks.
Bright lights in the sky.
Little grey aliens.

Is there anyone who has not heard of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs)? Although news and entertainment media go hot and cold on the topic, UFOs are seen virtually every day somewhere in the world. They have lurked in the shadows of human experience since the beginning of recorded civilization. Art works created as long as 6,500 years ago in Sumeria, Japan, Jugoslavia, and Australia depict "gods" and "goddesses" with remarkable similarities to the "almond-eyed" aliens that are accused of abducting people today. Flying disks are equally ancient, including some apparent crashes. Reports of people having contact, both voluntary and involuntary, with extraterrestrial ("ET") intelligences have been plentiful throughout all of history.

The idea that UFOs existed many centuries ago is often called the Ancient Astronauts Hypothesis. It postulates that members of a technologically-advanced extraterrestrial race came to earth many thousands of years ago. Their spacecraft were called "chariots," "flying globes," "clouds," and other descriptive words by primitive humans who did not understand technology.

The most famous ancient astronaut theorist is Erich von Däniken who gained fame in the early 1970's with his best-selling book *Chariots of the Gods?*. Another is Zecharia Sitchin whose Earth Chronicles series (*The Twelfth Planet*, etc.) interpret the writings of ancient civilizations from an ancient astronaut perspective. Sitchin suggests that a humanlike extraterrestrial society had biologically engineered *Homo sapiens* to be a slave race for extracting minerals from Earth and performing other tasks. This was the source of ancient creation myths including the Old Testament story of Adam and Eve who were created by "God" to be servants. One implication of the Sitchin theory is that we are all descendants of slaves.

Many ancient astronaut theorists draw their evidence from the Bible. In his late-1960's best seller *The Bible and Flying Saucers,*

Reverend Barry H. Downing cites many passages from the Old Testament to suggest that Judaism was started as the result of contact between human beings and ancient astronauts. Descriptions of the Old Testament "God" Jehovah strongly suggest rocket ships and people in space suits*:

1. "And all the time the Lord went before them [*i.e.,* the wandering Hebrew tribes], by day a pillar of cloud to guide them on their journey, by night a pillar of fire to give them light; so they could travel both by day and by night." (*Exodus* 13:21, REB). This sounds like a rocket ship emitting flames and smoke. We seem to find confirmation in *Exodus* 19:17-18 (NJB): "Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the bottom of the mountain. Mount Sinai was entirely wrapped in smoke, because Yahweh [*i.e.,* God] had descended on it in the form of fire."

2. When prophet Elijah departed this world, it seems he was taken up in a rocket or other flying vehicle: "As they [*i.e.,* Elijah and Elisha] were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind." (*2 Kings* 2:11, NIV).

3. Prophet Ezekiel gives a long-winded description of "God" flying in the sky and looking like "an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal." (*Ezekiel* 1:4, NIV). It is a near-perfect description of a rocket ship emitting flames and smoke as seen from a distance. When it came closer, Ezekiel saw inside "the likeness of four living creatures in human form." (*Ezekiel* 1:5, REB). Ezekiel adds many more details, and he informs the reader that the entity inside the craft gave him a message to spread to the Jews.

4. Daniel experienced a remarkable vision of a man who had a body that looked like topaz, a face like lightning, eyes like torches, arms and feet like bronze, and a booming voice. This description has remarkable similarities to the "Jesus" in the New Tes-

* These Old Testament stories and UFO elements are too extensive to fully reproduce in this book, so I give only brief excerpts. Interested readers are encouraged to read the Biblical accounts in full.

tament book of *Revelation.* People nearby did not see Daniel's vision, but they became afraid and fled. Like many UFO abductees, Daniel felt his strength leave him, *i.e.,* he became immobilized. The entity gave Daniel a detailed prediction of future events that can be read in the Old Testament. (See *Daniel* 10-12).

UFO connections to Judaism are also revealed outside the Bible. In *Wars of the Jews,* Josephus describes strange aerial lights during events that led to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple *c.*A.D. 70:

> ...there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year....[At another time] so great a light shone around the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright daytime; which light lasted half an hour.[1]

The Islamic Ahmadi sect believes that Jewish King Solomon traveled to Kashmir by air because the *Koran* (21:81, 38:36) says that God had given him the power to command the wind and go anywhere.

All of this would mean that the teachings of a future Messiah ultimately came from ETs who were giving apocalyptic messages to human prophets, just as UFO abductees and contactees claim to receive similar messages in our own time. This UFO activity continued with Christ.

Perhaps the most famous UFO connected to Jesus is the Star of Bethlehem. *Matthew* 2:9 describes it as an intelligently-guided object in the sky that led the magi to the birthplace, and then hovered over it: "...the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was." (NIV). The apocryphal *Protovangelion* (a.k.a. *Infancy Gospel of James, c.*2nd century A.D.) agrees:

> So the wise men went forth, and behold, the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over the cave where the young child was with Mary his mother.[2]

Christ's birth had also been accompanied by UFO phenomena. *Protovangelion* seems to describe a bright UFO that hovers over the birth cave and shines a spotlight inside:

> Then a bright cloud overshadowed the cave...But on a sudden the cloud became a great light in the cave, so that their eyes could hardly stand it.[3]

As we will see throughout this chapter, the word "cloud" was frequently used by ancient writers to describe any large object that hovered or traveled through the air. *Luke* 2:9-15 adds that some "angels" arrived in the night to announce the Messiah's birth to a group of nearby shepherds who were terrified by the "the glory of the Lord" that "shone around" the angels. (*Luke* 2:9, NIV)

The Ancient Astronaut Hypothesis puts a new perspective on the tradition that Mary had been impregnated by an angel. If those "angels" were members of a high-tech race, then it could mean that Mary was artificially inseminated. This would be in perfect accord with the Sitchin hypothesis that modern *Homo sapiens* had been genetically engineered much earlier in history by an extraterrestrial race. It also fits modern-day UFO abduction reports that indicate the existence of a large-scale but hidden ET program to create hybrids by using artificial breeding techniques on human abductees. (See, *e.g., The Threat* by Dr. David Jacobs and the works of Budd Hopkins).

UFOs followed Jesus for the rest of his life, and fascinating reports are found throughout the apocrypha.

The Life of John According to Serapion tells of John the Baptist and Jesus when they were about seven years old. Young John is alone in the desert with his mother who has just died. Jesus and his mother are taken to him in a strange "cloud" that behaves like a flying taxi. The luminous quality of this "cloud" and its frightening noise puts it squarely into the UFO category:

> And while he [*i.e.,* Jesus] was still speaking with his mother, behold a luminous cloud came down and placed itself between them. And Jesus said: "Call Salome and let us take her with us." And they mounted the cloud which flew with them to the wilderness of 'Ain Karim and to the spot where lay the body of the blessed Elizabeth [*i.e.,* John's mother], and where the holy John was sitting.

The Saviour said then to the cloud: "Leave us here at this side of the spot." And it immediately went, reaching that spot, and departed. Its noise, however, reached the ears of Mar John, who, seized with fear, left the body of his mother.

[Mary and Jesus stayed for seven days, then departed.]

And they mounted the cloud, and John looked at them and wept, and Mart Mary wept also bitterly over him...

And Jesus Christ said to her: "Do not weep over this child, O my mother. I shall not forget him." And while he was uttering these words, behold the cloud lifted them up and brought them to Nazareth.[4]

Decades later when John was baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River, the sky appeared to be "torn open" and something called the "Holy Spirit" descended like a dove and settled on Christ. A voice came from above announcing that Jesus was God's son. The apocryphal *Gospel of the Ebionites* adds a UFO element to this story: after the aerial voice made its announcement, "...immediately a great light shone around the place."[5] According to the Synoptic Gospels, the "Spirit" then led Jesus out to the desert for forty days and nights where he fasted and was "tempted by Satan." "Angels" attended to Christ during some of that time. To UFO theorists, this episode suggests that he was put through a lengthy initiation and indoctrination process by his ET sponsors after being baptized by John.*

ETs continued to influence Jesus during his ministry. One day Christ was on a mountain praying with three of his disciples who fell asleep. Jesus' clothes suddenly became dazzling white, and two men of remarkable appearance (identified as Moses and Elijah) came into his presence. They told him about his future destiny in Jerusalem. The three disciples woke up at this point and observed a "cloud" which cast its shadow over them and from which a voice was heard to say, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him." (*Luke* 9:35).

* The *Gospel of John* does not report the trip to the desert. *John* states that in the days immediately following his baptism, Jesus gathered his disciples, attended a wedding, and then went to Capernaum and Jerusalem.

Near the end of Christ's life when he was in anguish over his impending arrest, *Luke* 22:43 reports, "Then an angel appeared to him, coming from heaven to give him strength." (NJB).

No portion of the Christ story has more UFO and related phenomena than the aftermath of the crucifixion. The descriptions are long and detailed. The apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* has this to say:

During the night before the Lord's day dawned, while the soldiers were on guard [at Jesus' tomb], two by two during each watch, a loud noise came from the sky, and they saw the skies open up and two men come down from there in a burst of light and approach the tomb. The stone that had been pushed against the entrance began to roll by itself and moved away to one side; then the tomb opened up and both young men went inside.

Now when these soldiers saw this, they roused the centurion from his sleep, along with the elders. (Remember, they were also there keeping watch.) While they were explaining what they had seen, again they saw three men leaving the tomb, two supporting the third, and a cross was following them. The heads of the two reached up to the sky, while the head of the third, whom they led by the hand, reached beyond the skies. And they heard a voice from the skies that said, "Have you preached to those who sleep?" And an answer was heard from the cross, "Yes!"

These men then consulted with one another about going and reporting these things to Pilate. While they were still thinking about it, again the skies appeared to open and some sort of human being came down and entered the tomb. When those in the centurion's company saw this, they rushed out into the night to Pilate, having left the tomb which they were supposed to be guarding.

...

Early on the Lord's day, Mary of Magdala, a disciple of the Lord, was fearful...she did not perform at the tomb of the Lord what women are accustomed to do for their loved ones who die. Nevertheless, she took her friends with her and went to the tomb where he had been laid...

> And they went and found the tomb open. They went up to it, stepped down, and saw a young man sitting there (in) the middle of the tomb; he was handsome and wore a splendid robe. [The young man tells them Jesus is risen "and has gone back to the place he was sent from."] Then the women fled in fear.[6]

The apocryphal *Report of Pilate to Tiberius* describes a spectacular nocturnal UFO:

> ...early in the morning of the first of the Sabbaths, the resurrection of Christ was announced by a display of the most astonishing and surprising feats of divine Omnipotence ever performed. At the third hour of the night, the sun broke forth into such splendor as was never before seen, and the heaven became enlightened seven times more than on any other day...And the light ceased not to shine all that night.[7]*

One implication of the UFO evidence is that the entire "Christ Scenario" was planned and coordinated by ETs from beginning to end, and they convinced a man named Jesus to go along with it. Those ETs were the same type as the extraterrestrial "gods" that were said to guide some of the ancient Egyptian mystical sects and guilds that had been preaching physical resurrection for millennia. (See chapter 9.) When Jesus began getting cold feet on the evening of his arrest, an ET ("angel") gave him the courage to follow through. If, as discussed in the previous chapter, this was all part of a Passover Plot, then we face the startling possibility that members of an extraterrestrial race planned it, and they may have revived Jesus in the tomb using an energy technology that gave a jolt to his system and created the apparent "flash photo" image on the Turin Shroud as it was tautly stretched over the body. A curious feature of the Shroud is that it seems to faintly reveal some of Christ's teeth through a closed mouth, as well as finger bones, as though the body had been subjected to some x-ray energy.

After Christ's post-crucifixion appearances, he was "taken up into heaven." (*Mark* 16:19, *Luke* 24:51). A description of Christ's

* *The Archko Volume* contains additional UFO reports. See footnote 7.

Ascension is found in *Acts* 1:1-12 and, sure enough, it involves another taxi ride in a "cloud":

> As he [*i.e.*, Jesus] said this he was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud took him from their sight. They were still staring into the sky as he went, when suddenly two men in white were standing beside them, and they said, "Why are you Galileans standing here looking into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way as you have seen him go to heaven." (NJB)

If Jesus was taken away in a UFO, then the above passage suggests that he will return in a UFO for his Second Coming.

A longer description of the Ascension is contained in the apocryphal *Pistis Sophia,* which is a combination of Gnostic writings that started being penned *c.*A.D. 250. The laborious details suggest that someone had struggled to preserve the memory of a genuine UFO event that was not well understood:

> It came to pass, therefore, that the disciples were sitting together on the Mount of Olives...Jesus sat a little removed from them.
>
> It came to pass, therefore, on the fifteenth day of the month...the day of the full moon, on that day, when the sun had risen in its going, that there came forth after it a great stream of light shining exceedingly; there was no measure to the light with which it was surrounded, for it came forth from the light of lights...And this stream of light poured over Jesus, and surrounded him entirely. He was seated apart from his disciples, and was shining exceedingly; there was no measure to the light in which he was.
>
> But the disciples saw not Jesus because of the great light in which he was, or which proceeded from him; for their eyes were blinded by the great light in which he was. They saw the light only, shooting forth great rays of light. And the rays of light were not equal together, but the light was of every kind, and of every type, from the lower to the higher part thereof; each [ray] more admirable than its fellow, in infinite manner, in a great glory of immeasurable light, which stretched from the earth to the heav-

ens. And when the disciples saw the light, they were in great fear and great confusion.

It came to pass, therefore, when this stream of light had come upon Jesus, and had gradually surrounded him, that Jesus was borne upward or soared aloft, shining exceedingly in an immeasurable light. And the disciples gazed after him, none of them speaking, until he had entered into the heaven. They were all in great silence...

It came to pass, when Jesus had ascended into heaven, after the third hour, that all the powers of the heavens were confused, and all were thrown one on another in turn, they and all their aeons, all their regions, and all their orders, and the whole earth was shaken, and all the inhabitants thereof. And confusion was upon all men in the world, and also upon the disciples, and all thought that the world would surely be destroyed.

And all the powers which are in the heavens did not cease to be in confusion, they and the whole world, and all were shaken the one on the other in turn, from the third hour of the fifteenth day...until the ninth hour of the morrow.

And all the angels with their archangels, and all the powers of the height, all sang from the interior of the interiors, so that the whole world heard their voice; they ceased not till the ninth hour of the morrow. But the disciples sat together in fear, and were in the greatest possible distress. They feared because of the great earthquake which was taking place, and they wept together, saying: "What will be? Surely the saviour will not destroy all the regions?" Thus saying, they wept together.

On the ninth hour of the morrow, the heavens were opened, and they saw Jesus descending, shining exceedingly; there was no measure to the light which surrounded him, for he shone more brightly than when he had ascended to the heavens, so that it is impossible for any in this world to describe the light in which he was. He shot forth rays shining exceedingly; his rays were without measure, nor were his rays of light equal together, but they were of every figure and of every type, some being more admirable than the others in infinite manner. And they were all pure light in every part at the same time. It was of three degrees, one surpassing the other in infinite manner. The second, which was

in the midst, excelled the first which was below it, and the third, the most admirable of all, surpassed the two below it. The first glory was placed below all, like to the light which came upon Jesus before he ascended into the heavens, and was very regular as to its own light. And the three degrees of light were of every variety of light and type, each excelling the others in infinite manner.

It came to pass, when the disciples had seen these things, that they feared exceedingly, and were troubled. But Jesus, the compassionate and merciful-minded, when he saw that his disciples were troubled with great confusion, spake unto them, saying: "Take courage. It is I, be not afraid."[8]

ET participation in Christianity did not end with Christ. Apocryphal reports of mother Mary's Assumption are remarkable for their UFO qualities and troubling spiritual implications. An ancient document called *The Assumption* recounts this event and exists in many editions. It was popular with early Christians and is said to be based on the eyewitness testimony of Apostle John and Joseph of Arimathea.

According to the leading Latin version of *The Assumption*, in the second year after Jesus was taken to Heaven, Mary was still grieving. An angel came to her "shining in a garment of great brightness" (III:21) and gave her a palm branch. The angel told Mary that the palm branch would be used three days later when she would be taken out of her body. Mary asked that the Apostles be allowed to join her when "I am to depart out of the body." (IV:211). The angel departed "with great light" (III:210) and the palm branch "shone with exceeding brightness." (III:211). This was clearly no ordinary palm branch.

The angels followed Mary's wishes by offering the Apostles airborne taxi rides on noisy "clouds":

And behold, suddenly, while Saint John was preaching at Ephesus, on the Lord's day, at the third hour, there was a great earthquake, and a cloud raised him up and took him out of sight of all and brought him before the door of the house where Mary was. (IV:211)...And lo, suddenly by the commandment of God all the apostles were lifted up on a cloud and caught away from the places

where they were preaching and set down before the door of the house wherein Mary dwelt. (V:211)

The Apostles comforted Mary for the next three days. At the appointed time, "Lord Jesus Christ came with a great multitude of angels, and a great light came down upon that place, and the angels were singing hymns and praising the Lord." (VII:211). Mary lay down on a bed, and the Apostles saw her leave the body in a spectacular way:

> ...the apostles saw her soul, that it was of such whiteness that no tongue of mortal men can worthily express it; for it excelled all whiteness of snow and of all metal and silver that glisteneth with great brightness of light. (VIII:212)

Jesus instructed Apostle Peter on the placement of Mary's body while she, as a soul, was delivered to angel Michael. Michael departed with Mary, and Jesus accompanied the angels into Heaven. Mary's body "shone with such brightness...but the appearance could not be looked upon for the exceeding flashing of light...it was most pure and not stained with any manner of defilement." (X:213).

If this story is given a UFO interpretation, then it appears that the ETs are able to make souls leave their bodies. They can then restrain the souls in a manner that permits them to be transported (perhaps by encasing them in an intense energy visible to the human eye). They can also preserve the soulless body with an energy that is also visible.

The narrative continues as the Apostles carried away Mary's body:

> And behold a new miracle. There appeared a very great cloud over the bier [as the Apostles were carrying it to the sepulchre site] like the great circle that useth to be seen about the splendour of the moon: and an host of angels was in the cloud sending forth a song of sweetness, and the earth resounded with the noise of that great melody. (XII:213-214).

The above passage combines classic UFO elements. The "cloud" is circular in shape and the "angels" fly inside, *i.e.*, it is a flying saucer

with occupants. The "angels" have the technology to play loud music from the craft to impress humans on the ground.

The Apostles carried Mary's body to a tomb in the valley of Jehosaphat. Along the way, a high Jewish priest encouraged some townspeople to upset the bier, but they were blinded by angels from above. Some of the afflicted were healed with the "palm branch" when they confessed Jesus Christ.

At the tomb, Jesus reappeared to the Apostles "with a great multitude of angels, and light flashing with great brightness." (XVI:215). He commanded angel Michael to bring Mary. She then reentered her body and revived it. Jesus was carried up into Heaven, followed by Mary who was reunited with her body. The Apostles were once again taken up in "clouds" and whisked back to their places of preaching. This final part of the story indicates that ETs have the ability to make souls reenter their bodies after the souls have been extracted and transported.

Other variations of the story provide more evidence that Mary's Assumption involved UFOs. A Greek version declares that the "clouds" were not composed of water, but were bodies of light in the sky, *i.e.*, "clouds of light." These "clouds" were large: the one that carried Matthew was said to overshadow the ship he was on. (23:204). In a Syriac version, the "cloud of light" was called a "chariot [*i.e.*, vehicle] of light" into which Mary's body was placed when it ascended to Heaven. Versions written in the Sahidic (southern Coptic) and Bohairic (northern Coptic) dialects describe them as "chariots of the Cherubim." Aba Evodius—archbishop of Rome after Peter the Apostle—tells of a similar post-crucifixion event:

> Whilst our Saviour was yet speaking with us, we heard hymns in the height. Straightway we looked, and saw a great chariot of light. It came and stayed in our midst, Cherubim drawing [*i.e.* piloting] it, the holy Virgin Mary sitting upon it, and shining ten thousand times more than the sun and the moon.[9]

Paul's conversion to Christianity, which occurred after Mary's Assumption, may have been the result of his own UFO encounter. According to *Acts* 9:1-9, Paul was on the road to Damascus intending to persecute Christians, but an amazing vision stopped him:

> On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He said, "who are you, sir?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do. (NAB)

In regard to the light, Paul said, "About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions." (*Acts* 26:13, NIV).

If Paul's conversion was the result of a UFO encounter, a statement of his implies that an ET, or at least an ET-transported Christ, was the ultimate source of Pauline (orthodox) Christianity:

> Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.
>
> *Galatians* 1:11-12 (NAB)

Unusual events with UFO overtones followed other Apostles as they evangelized after the crucifixion. In the apocryphal *Acts of Peter and Andrew*, Andrew is picked up and carried in a "cloud of light" to a mountain site where four other Apostles are located. In another instance, Philip was told by an angel to travel on a particular road where he met a eunuch whom he baptized, and then "the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more..." (*Acts* 8:39, NAB) According to *Acts* 10:9-13, hot-tempered Peter had a vision that seemed to involve projected images from the sky:

> ...Peter went to the housetop at about the sixth hour [*i.e.*, around noontime] to say his prayers. He felt hungry and was looking forward to his meal, but before it was ready he fell into a trance and saw heaven thrown open and something like a big sheet being let down to earth by its four corners; it contained every kind of animal, reptile and bird. A voice then said to him, "Now, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter answered, "Certainly not, Lord; I have never yet eaten anything profane or unclean." Again, a second time, the voice spoke to him, "What God has made clean, you have no right to call profane." This was repeated three times, and then suddenly the container was drawn up to heaven again. (NJB)

A New Testament book that generates much excitement in America today is *Revelation*. Many Christians try to outguess each other as to which symbols relate to which current events in order the predict the End of the World. *Revelation* was probably written sometime between A.D. 54 and 95, and it also seems to be the tale of a UFO encounter.

Revelation's author identifies himself as John, but it is uncertain if this was Apostle John, Presbyter John, or someone else. Whoever he was, "John" was apparently on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea and quite alone when he was approached by a person he believed to be Christ. This "Jesus" had eyes like a "fiery flame," feet like "polished brass" (suggesting metal boots), and a voice as loud as a trumpet or like the sound of rushing water (suggesting electronic amplification). (*Revelation* 14-16). John saw a door open to "heaven," and he entered through it. Like Ezekiel centuries earlier, John was given a scroll that tasted sweet to the tongue but became bitter in his stomach, indicating that he may have been drugged*. (*Revelation* 10:8-11). His hosts performed an elaborate ritual during which they opened a set of scrolls containing strange images that were sometimes labeled with words. John dutifully wrote down his experience afterwards and the terrifying meaning of the illustrations as explained by his hosts. All of these elements add up to a fairly typical UFO abduction scenario that we still read about today: the abductee is confronted by a strange entity, is taken skyward into a waiting craft, is physically and/or mentally tampered with, given a spiritual and/or apocalyptic message, and is returned home.

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* Was he given an *Amanita muscaria* mushroom? The mushroom cap can look like a little scroll which "lay open in his hand" (*Revelation* 10:2), and the white spots can resemble writing. A similar object was fed to Old Testament prophet Ezekiel. Some writers believe that the author of *Revelation* and prophet Ezekiel were describing religious rites involving hallucinogens. Hmm...is this evidence of ET drug pushers?

Other people connected to Christ may have also had UFO contacts. In chapters 13 and 15, we examined legends about his family ties to England. According to one tradition from southern England, when Jesus' grandmother Anne fled Cornwall to Palestine while pregnant with Mary, "an angel caused her to enter a vessel, and took her to Asia to Jaffa, where she landed, and whence she reached Nazareth."[10] About fifteen years later, she returned to Cornwall. "The same angel again took her over the waves."[11]

In chapter 18, we noted traditions that Mary Magdalene and friends took a boat from Palestine to Gaul after the crucifixion. Theirs was no ordinary boat since it had no oars, sails, or rudder. Despite the lack of anything to propel or guide it, the boat miraculously navigated itself all the way to a port in southern France. Modern UFO lore contains many reports of smooth cylindrical "cigar-shaped" UFOs, as well as UFOs around and inside bodies of water. Such craft might have been described two thousand years ago as "boats without oars, sails or rudders."

If Jesus was taken aboard a UFO at his Ascension, then did his extraterrestrial sponsors fly him anywhere else to preach?

When the Spaniards began colonizing the Americas in the 16th century, they were stunned to find pyramids similar to those of Egypt and symbols like those of Christianity. The cross symbol was prominent in Mexico and Central America where it was used to represent the "Tree of Life." Associated with the symbol was a deity known as Quetzalcoatl who was portrayed as a feathered snake with either a human or serpent head. Quetzalcoatl was said in legend to be a man of fair skin, bearded, attractive in appearance, and adorned with a long white flowing robe. Many historians believe that Quetzalcoatl was based on a true person who lived before A.D. 300.

Who, if anyone, was the original Quetzalcoatl? Some Spanish conquerors decided that he must have been Apostle Thomas who, according to tradition, went to Asia after the crucifixion. Perhaps he crossed the Pacific Ocean to arrive in southern Mexico or Central America. A Central American ruler in the 10th century A.D. called himself Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, and he was described with physical features similar to the original Quetzalcoatl. Some historians therefore believe that the legends of both

Quetzalcoatls were blended together. The tenth-century Quetzalcoatl was said to be born of a virgin, but it is not certain if this legend arose before or after the Spaniards arrived in America with their Christian teachings.

Had Jesus actually set foot in the Western Hemisphere?

The *Book of Mormon* says "yes."

Mormon was reportedly discovered in the nineteenth century by a young man named Joseph Smith. He said that the original text had been engraved on metal plates and buried *c.*A.D. 421 on Cumorah Hill near what is today Palmyra, New York. Smith claims that he had angelic visions showing him where to find the burial spot. His visions contained several UFO elements. For example, he said that he was paralyzed before seeing the "angel," and paralysis is a common phenomenon at the start of UFO abductions. Some of the angelic images repeated themselves like projected recordings that were replayed.

The *Book of Mormon* contains an extensive history of pre-Columbian civilization. According to *Mormon,* Jewish settlers had traveled by boat from Jerusalem to the Americas beginning *c.*2700 B.C. They and their descendants built cities in North and Central America. Some of the cities, however, were destroyed in A.D. 34 by a God-inflicted cataclysm. When we read *Mormon's* description of the event, it comes across as a large-scale nuclear strike with its sharp flashes of light, upheavals, incredible winds, and three-day nuclear winter. Most Mormons believe the episode to be a combination of volcano and earthquake, but the event was apparently without warning, only three hours in duration, and something that no one had seen before:

> ...in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land.
>
> And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder.
>
> And there were exceeding sharp lightnings, such as never had been known in all the land.
>
> And the city of Zarahemla did take fire.

And the city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea, and inhabitants thereof were drowned.

And the earth was carried up upon the city of Moronihah that in the place of the city there became a great mountain.

And there was a great and terrible destruction in the land southward.

But behold, there was more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, because of the tempest and the whirlwinds and the thunderings and the lightnings, and the exceeding great quaking of the whole earth;

And the highways were broken up, and the level roads were spoiled, and many smooth places became rough.

And many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain, and the places were left desolate.

And there were some cities which remained; but the damage thereof was exceeding great, and there were many of them who were slain.

And there were some who were carried away in the whirlwind; and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away.

And thus the face of the whole earth became deformed, and because of the tempests, and the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the quaking of the earth.

And behold, the rocks were rent in twain; they were broken up upon the face of the whole earth, insomuch that they were found in broken fragments, and in seams and in cracks, upon all the face of the land.

And it came to pass that when the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the storm, and the tempest, and the quakings of the earth did cease—for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours—and then behold, there was a darkness upon the face of the land.

And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness;

And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and exceedingly dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all;

And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars, for so great were the mists of darkness which were upon the face of the land.

And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days that there was no light seen....

3 Nephi 8:5-23

Later that year, no less a person than Jesus Christ himself made a personal appearance before a crowd of survivors:

...they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst [*i.e.*, dared] not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist [*i.e.*, knew] not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.

And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

3 Nephi 11:8-10

Jesus allowed people to touch his crucifixion wounds, and then he proceeded to give a long sermon. When he finished, a "cloud" passed over the people and Jesus ascended once again into the sky. He reappeared later to give another sermon, and when he rose again to "heaven" he took along a few people who:

...saw and heard unspeakable things. And it was forbidden them that they should utter; neither was it given unto them power that

> they could utter the things which they saw and heard; And whether they were in the body or out of the body, they could not tell....
> *3 Nephi* 28:13-15.

Some Mormons, but not all, believe that these appearances of Jesus in North America were the basis of the Quetzalcoatl legend, *i.e.,* Quetzalcoatl was actually Christ. The worship of Quetzalcoatl seems to have begun roughly around Jesus' time, although at least one artifact from a century earlier seems to depict Quetzalcoatl, indicating that he was a god with an earlier origin.

Few historians give credence to the *Mormon* version of ancient American history. The theory of Jewish origins had already been widely rejected before the 1830 publication of the *Book of Mormon.* If Jews had created the pre-Columbian cultures, then ancient Americans should have been engaged in writing and metal forging just as the Jews were doing in the Old World, but they were not.

Mormon highlights an enduring mystery. Why were ancient civilizations of Egypt and America so similar? They shared a zeal for pyramid-building and mummy-wrapping, and some of their religious rites were very much alike, such as the ritual of baptism. A well-known Egyptian relief known as "Baptism of Pharaoh" is nearly identical to an image in a Mexican codex (book)*. Both civilizations depicted an identical type of seated god with arched legs. One explanation is that Egyptians had crossed the oceans and perpetuated their culture in the Americas**.

Another explanation is the Ancient Astronauts Hypothesis.

Many ancient American deities were humanlike extraterrestrial "gods" similar to those of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, *i.e.,* they flew in the sky and were deeply involved in human affairs. Some Mayan gods were depicted inside "flying suns" (disks) as though the suns were piloted. Egyptian lore claims that the design for the first pyramid descended from "heaven," *i.e.,* it came

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* See *Images of Ancient America* by John L. Sorenson, p. 226.

** Some German scientists made headlines in the 1990's when they found possible traces of coca in Egyptian mummies. Coca only grew in the Americas at the time, suggesting that there was transoceanic commerce between the old and new worlds.

from an extraterrestrial source. Ancient Egyptians, Jews, and Christians claimed that these flying "gods" (or "God") and "angels" were the primary source of their apocalyptic/resurrection teachings. It would be no surprise if those ETs tried to spread the same kind of religion in the Americas. Did they get Jesus involved after he survived the crucifixion?

In *Jesus' Tomb in India,* Paul Pappas remarks, "If one were to accept all of the legends concerning Jesus that have been circulating since his time, Jesus must have traveled around the world and preached everywhere."[12] A Jesus-like figure reportedly visited islands in the Pacific, including Polynesia, and then he was seen in Peru and the Western Hemisphere. Peruvian legends describe a pale prophet who appeared in the towns of Cocha and Caba Clos performing miracles with UFO overtones: he escaped death one time by causing lightning to come from the sky, and in another episode he was rescued from arrows by a miraculous curtain of flame sent by God. North and South Americans have legends of a Caucasian man in white clothing who was known as Kate-Zahl (The Prophet), Mahnt-Azoma, and other names. Similar stories are found in Oklahoma, among the Cherokees of West Virginia, and with the O'Chippewas of Michigan. Do all of these legends mean that Christ was globe hopping as part of an ET program to create a worldwide "Christ religion"? Or was a Palestinian named Jesus simply one of many men who were picked by ET emissaries to become Christ figures around the world?

Why would a space-age race even bother?

This is a compelling question when we consider that many modern-day UFO abductees and contactees return from their experiences bearing religious and/or apocalyptic messages allegedly given to them by their captors. In other words, these ETs seem to have been engaged in religious indoctrination for thousands of years. Most of the sects they inspire remain small and marginalized, but a few make it big like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Latter Day Saints (Mormons).

But to what end?

Many theories have been proposed, and here are just a few:

1. The ET's operate under a directive not to openly interfere with our primitive and violent society, so they remain forever in

the background as an enigma to us. All the while, they covertly civilize us by implanting apocalyptic/resurrection religions. Their objective is to help the human race graduate from the "cosmic kindergarten" of Earth to join the more spiritually and technologically advanced peoples of the cosmos. Perhaps the ETs feel a responsibility to do so because they had originally created *Homo sapiens* as a slave race but do not use us for that purpose any more. One day they will openly reveal themselves to guide human society, and that is the true meaning of their apocalyptic messages.

2. An opposing theory is that the ETs have been using classic Machiavellian techniques to covertly manipulate their slave race to keep it spiritually imprisoned on Earth. Ancient Mesopotamian texts state that the "gods" possessed secret knowledge of how to "divide and conquer," and that their intention has been to prevent their slave race from gaining true spiritual wisdom. The apocalyptic religions they plant on Earth have exactly that effect: they keep the human race in a chronic state of division and strife, and many people feel that such religions perpetuate superstition, fear, and ignorance. The ETs will probably continue this activity indefinitely.

3. Earth is a prison where we have been sent by the ET race to work out our spiritual salvation. Once we do that, we can leave.

4. Earth is targeted for invasion by an extraterrestrial race that operates on a much longer time frame than we do (*i.e.*, a thousand years to us is like a decade to them). Earth's population is being kept in a state of disunity to make it "soft" for takeover when the invasion actually occurs. (This technique is described in Sun-tzu's famous two thousand year old treatise *The Art of War.)* "Judgment Day" and "Second Coming" teachings are methods to throw target populations off-guard by causing them to accept a sudden extraterrestrial presence without resisting it. The Bible says that cataclysms and massive death will be part of that scenario, *i.e.*, the human race is being promised a rather nasty genocide sometime down the road, but we as a target population will not prepare or resist because of the religious beliefs we have been taught.

5. In his book, *The Threat*, Dr. Jacobs finds evidence of a large-scale effort by ETs to breed half-human half-ET hybrids. Does this mean that *Homo sapiens* will be eradicated to make room for a new hybrid race on Earth? By some estimates, modern *Homo sapiens* may have appeared abruptly on Earth only ten to thirty thousand years ago, and our forerunners seemingly vanished at the same time. Will the same thing happen between us and the ET hybrids?

Two items of Old Testament apocrypha seem to lend weight to the idea that the ETs were, and perhaps still are, operating Earth as a prison for souls. Such ETs may have been the inspiration for the Gnostic idea of "Archons." *The Book of Enoch* (a.k.a. *1 Enoch*) and *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (a.k.a. *2 Enoch*) were named after the second man called Enoch in the Old Testament. This Enoch reportedly lived in prehistory before the Great Flood, and he has the distinction of being the first Biblical prophet to enjoy an "ascension," *i.e.*, being taken bodily into heaven. The orthodox Bible tells us nothing about Enoch's experiences after he ascended, but *1 Enoch* and *2 Enoch* go into great detail. *1 Enoch* is a compilation of writings assembled in the second and first centuries B.C. *2 Enoch* is shorter and was written about two to three hundred years later, *i.e.*, *c.*A.D. 100. *2 Enoch* appears to have been written independently of *1 Enoch,* but both works clearly relied on some of the same traditions. Neither book is accepted as canon by the traditional Jewish and Christian sects, but *1* and *2 Enoch* were quite influential in the centuries immediately following their appearances.

1 Enoch is heavily apocalyptic, and it greatly influenced Jews in Palestine, including many who became Christians. In fact, an apocalyptic prediction from *1 Enoch* is quoted in the New Testament epistle *Jude* (14-15). *1 Enoch* contains many themes that were adopted by orthodox Christians: a "Son of Man" who will sit in judgment over the people of Earth, a future day when the righteous will be exalted by God and evil people will be destroyed, and the symbol of the lamb.

According to *1 Enoch*, Enoch took more than one journey to heaven. His first ascension seems to be a trip to the stars in UFOs, *i.e.*, in flying "clouds":

> ...clouds invited me and a mist summoned me, and the course of the stars and the lightnings sped and hastened me, and the winds in the vision caused me to fly and lifted me upward, and bore me into heaven.
>
> *1 Enoch* 14:8

Later in the book, the author declares, "And in those days a whirlwind carried me off from the earth, and set me down at the end of the heavens." (*1 Enoch* 39:3).

2 Enoch adds a detail that makes the experience sound like a garden variety UFO abduction. Prior to being taken up, Enoch awoke in bed to find strange entities in his room. Even though the beings were not the little "greys" of today's lore, the overall scene could easily come from a modern UFO book:

> On the first day of the first month, I was alone in my house, and I rested on my bed and slept. And as I slept a great grief came upon my heart, and I wept with mine eyes in my dream, and I could not understand what this grief meant, or what would happen to me. And there appeared to me two men very tall, such as I have never seen on earth. And their faces shone like the sun, and their eyes were like burning lamps; and fire came forth from their lips. Their dress had the appearance of feathers: their feet were purple, their wings were brighter than gold; their hands whiter than snow. They stood at the head of my bed and called me by my name. I awoke from my sleep and saw clearly these men standing in front of me. I hastened and made obeisance to them and was terrified....
>
> *2 Enoch* 1:2-7

The entities calmed his fears and instructed him to tell his family that he would be departing. After Enoch complied, he was taken skyward:

> It came to pass when I had spoken to my sons, these men summoned me and took me on their wings and placed me on the clouds. And lo! the clouds moved. And again (going) higher I saw the air and (going still) higher I saw the ether, and they placed me in the first heaven...And they brought before my face the elders, and the rulers of the orders of the stars, and they showed me the two hundred angels who rule the stars and their heavenly service; And they fly with their wings and go round all (the stars) as they float.
>
> *2 Enoch* 3-4

During one of his visits to space, Enoch saw objects with UFO characteristics:

> And I saw there something like an invisible cloud; for by reason of its depth I could not look over, and I saw a flame of fire blazing brightly, and things like shining mountains circling and sweeping to and fro.
>
> *1 Enoch* 108:4

As in a typical UFO abduction, Enoch was returned to the place from which he had been taken—in this case, his house.

Enoch underwent religious/apocalyptic indoctrination during his abduction episodes. Like the author of *Revelation*, he was told to write down his experiences and the grim apocalypses revealed to him. Many of the "visions" were displayed on tablets and pictures shown by his hosts, just as the author of *Revelation* had received most of his apocalyptic visions from pictures on scrolls.

Perhaps Enoch's most significant experience is told in *1 Enoch* which seems to reveal a massive "soul recycling" operation that is connected to the UFO phenomenon, the "entity of light" that many people report during "near-death" experiences, and apocalyptic religion. The implications are bizarre and chilling, and they lead us to the outermost fringes of Christology and UFO theory.

Near-death experiences have been the subject of many studies and books in recent decades. In a typical near-death episode, a person leaves the body (usually when the body approaches death) and encounters a "tunnel." At the end of the tunnel is a brilliant light that seems to exude serenity and peace. Many near-death victims communicate back and forth with the light thinking that it is God. They are then encouraged to go back to their bodies on Earth.

In recent years, a connection has been noted between the UFO phenomenon and some elements of the near-death experience. For example, some UFO abductees report being instilled with feelings of love and warmth from a clearly artificial source while aboard a UFO. Some of those witnesses encounter "entities" and a "light" which create similar feelings as those experienced by near-death victims, including a sense that they have communed with a Supreme Being. (See, *e.g., The Watchers* and *The Watchers II* by Raymond Fowler.) Is the near-death "entity of light" part of a "spiri-

tual processing" operation carried out by ETs? Did Enoch get a glimpse into what happens (or used to happen) to souls from Earth when death overtakes the body?

When Enoch was taken to the stars, he entered a place that seemed to be made of crystals. He also saw objects that appeared to be on fire. The "house" he entered felt both fiery hot and icy cold to him. He was escorted to another "house," and there he saw a great light that he assumed to be God. Around the light were servants numbering "ten thousand times ten thousand." (*1 Enoch* 14:22). The "light" could communicate with Enoch just as the "light" does with modern near-death victims. After Enoch communicated with this "light" and received apocalyptic messages, he was taken to several other places, including large hollow areas containing "the spirits of the souls of the dead." (*1 Enoch* 22:3). The angel told Enoch, "all the souls of the children of men should assemble here." In other words, the hollow areas were designed to receive and hold souls when their bodies died on Earth. Enoch states that he could perceive the souls, and he asked his host why they were separated into groups. He was informed that they were separated according to the seriousness of their sins. Enoch was next escorted to a place where a burning fire "ran without resting" along a certain course that it never deviated from, suggesting some kind of electrical current or device. (*1 Enoch* 23:2).

Another reference to the crystal city and soul containment is found in *2 Enoch* 5: "And then I looked and saw the treasuries of the snow and ice and the angels who guard their terrible storeplaces. And the treasuries of the clouds from which they come forth and into which they enter." (*2 Enoch* 5). The word "clouds" seems to refer, once again, to flying vehicles. Here they seem to be an intrinsic part of the soul-processing operation.

Enoch's description seems to be of a very icy place to which souls from Earth are irresistibly drawn at death (perhaps by a "being of light"), and then are warehoused. UFO activity is extensive, and the operation is staffed by many tens of thousands of ETs. The "entity of light" that people see during near-death experiences may be nothing more than an object that lures souls to the processing area when they leave their earthly bodies after death, much like a "bug-zapper" light lures insects. When a soul reaches the "light," it will be sent back to the same body if the body is still viable, and

this is done by feeding the soul with the things it responds to: feelings of love, meaning, and purpose. If the departed soul cannot be returned to the same body, it finds itself in a containment area where it is processed in some fashion that seems to involve ice and "fire" (which may have been Enoch's word to describe electrical phenomena). Then—if we are to believe the evidence of reincarnation—souls wind up back on Earth in infant bodies with amnesia about their previous existences*. Some near-death victims report a sense that they had been to "the light" before, *i.e.*, they have returned "home." This feeling may be the result of being processed there after each lifetime on Earth.

Is such a scenario mathematically plausible? Roughly six thousand people die on Earth every hour. Can that many souls be "processed?" What if the souls of many animals are like us and are also "processed" in the same way? Enoch reports that "ten thousand times ten thousand" personnel were involved in the operation he witnessed, and so the capacity was (and perhaps still is) vast. This might cause us to wonder if "soul recycling" is one of the principal industries in this universe to keep souls contained inside. In light of what Enoch saw, the words of *2 Enoch* 60:1-3 seem appropriate: "If he does an injury to the soul of a man, he does an injury to his own soul...He who kills the soul of a man, kills his own soul...He who prepares a net for another man will fall into it himself..." Even if souls are immortal and cannot truly be killed, the act of "plowing and replowing" a soul into bodies lifetime after lifetime while inducing amnesia each time comes about as close to "killing" a soul as may be possible. However, the situation could get even worse. Some scientists believe that the universe itself may

* One of the most common consequences of UFO abduction is the amnesia suffered by victims. They often remember only seeing a light in the sky and then discovering that a few hours or so have mysteriously vanished from their lives. The buried memories can be recovered, but usually with difficulty. Abduction researchers have concluded that UFO occupants can induce selective amnesia in their victims, and they actively do so as part of their abduction program. This could be evidence that inducing amnesia is an integral part of the soul-processing operation witnessed by Enoch. On the modern evidence for reincarnation, I suggest the research of Dr. Ian Stevenson.

eventually collapse into a type of ultimate black hole. If this scenario is fulfilled, then all souls that have not escaped the universe are at risk of being crushed into virtual nothingness for an extremely long period of time. Perhaps such a danger is already present: many astronomers believe that black holes (*i.e.*, collapsed stars with such high gravity that even light cannot escape) exist throughout the universe. Souls that attach to matter could conceivably be ejected into them and remain crushed inside for billions of years, *i.e.*, the life of the black hole. If Jesus was a Gnostic, then he would have been preaching a message of spiritual escape from the universe and its possible dangers*.

How does the "Jesus the Ancient Astronaut" theory fit with traditions that he lived until old age and his body was buried somewhere on Earthly soil? The answer may lie in modern UFO abduction/contactee cases. After their ET contacts, humans are typically left alone to live out their lives. If Jesus had been flown around after the crucifixion, his ET involvements would have probably decreased or stopped, leaving him to finish his life as any other human.

The theories in this chapter are the most mind-stretching of the Christ theories. They also earn the most guffaws from academics. Many intelligent people believe that UFOs are nothing more than hoaxes, delusions, and misperceived natural phenomena. The "entity of light" seen by near-death victims has been explained as an illusion caused by oxygen deprivation when the body stops breathing, and/or it is a normal mental function to cushion the shock of approaching death. Maybe Enoch's "visions" were nothing more than lucid dreams or the products of sleep paralysis. After all, he says that he was asleep when his first vision began.

Where do we draw the line between reality and fiction? That is a question we constantly face when studying the life of Jesus.

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* How might this fit with evidence that some deceased people visit loved ones after dying and seem free to move around, at least for a while? In *The Afterlife Experiments*, Dr. Gary Schwartz analyzes apparently legitimate mediums who report that many souls find themselves in a good place after death, although Dr. Schwartz theorizes that the mediums may not be contacting an actual soul but a type of imprint left by the personality.

Taking Flight

The morning arrived for Joe's flight back to New York.

"Joe!" Serena exclaimed, "I want you to have a souvenir of your trip."

She disappeared into the guest room as Orion and Joe exited the house to put Joe's travel bag in the trunk of an SUV. Serena emerged from the house with a small charm dangling from a necklace.

"It's a dove," she pointed out, "Ryan gave it to me as a good luck charm for my exams when we were in college. We leave it in the guest room as good luck for the people who sleep there. I want you to have it."

"I will treasure it," Joe said as he grasped it and gave it a kiss. Serena blushed.

Saturday morning traffic was light, and they arrived at LAX with time to spare. Serena excused herself to use a rest room as the two men strolled to the ticket counter.

Inside the ladies' room, Serena stood at a sink and pulled out a small identification card from her purse. She had discovered it on the floor of the guest room when she went to fetch Joe's gift. Now she had to decide what to do with it.

In her hand was an identification badge from a hospital in New York with Joe's picture. The name on it was Joseph Crystal, and he was a medical intern in the cardiology department.

Serena scraped the card against her fingers as she pondered her next step. Does this mean that Joe is a fake? Or is he Jesus Christ born into a human family as he had been two thousand years ago? Should Serena give the card to Joe before he boards the plane? Should she let her husband see it?

Serena pondered the dilemma a few moments.

No, she decided. *Joe said that he will be starting his Second Coming in earnest on Monday. Let's see what happens. In the meantime, I'll overnight this card to the hospital and let them return it to him.*

"Boarding flight number 107," came the announcement.

Serena rushed out of the rest room. She passed an airport lounge on her way to the gate, and on the television she caught a

snippet of a news report. Something unexplainable was starting to happen in the Middle East.

She wondered when she would see Joe again.

Chapter 21

Jesus: Toast of Hollywood

"You think Jesus is still a box office draw?" some Hollywood executives argued with Mel Gibson, although not in these exact words. "Forget it! He's toast!"

Despite rejection from the major studios, Gibson had a vision, and so he self-financed *The Passion of the Christ* to see it become a box office hit with over $600,000,000 in revenues, and still climbing. He turned Jesus into another kind of toast, namely, the sort made with smiles and glasses of champagne.

And if toast is to be the opening theme of this chapter, then we should not overlook the "Virgin Mary Toast" that sold on eBay. Diane Duyser of Florida just wanted to make a grilled cheese sandwich in 1994, but when she pulled it out of her toaster, she saw mother Mary staring back at her as a burnt image in the bread. This miraculous bread not only failed to crumble or grow moldy after ten years, it brought Ms. Duyser luck with $70,000 in casino winnings. She finally decided to part with her special sandwich in 2004 by putting it up for auction on eBay with the cautionary words, "The toast is not intended for consumption." Behold another miracle! It sold for $28,000.00.

In Mexico, tortillas are the favored carbohydrates. In 1977, Maria Rubio was cooking one to make a burrito, and a three-inch Jesus face was burned into it. She framed it and made a shrine which attracted more than 11,000 visitors. That's some cooking!

Not to be outdone, Matteo Brandi, a bar manager in Switzerland, decided to sell his oyster shell on eBay in 2005. The shell resembled a distorted Jesus, and it had stuck to his hand as though God was calling him. As this book goes to press, the world anxiously awaits news of the selling price.

The biggest Jesus jackpot went to Oklahoma evangelist Oral Roberts who saw a nine-hundred foot tall Jesus standing near a hospital complex that he was building by his university. When Roberts described the vision to his followers, they were so thrilled that they sent him millions of dollars in donations.

What does it all mean? Are Jesus and his mother manifesting themselves in many forms to remind us of their constant pres-

ence in our lives? Are they also competing with each other for attention? Mother Mary has certainly upstaged her son in the apparitions department. Places like Guadalupe, Fatima, Lourdes and Zeitun are global pilgrimage destinations because of her eerie appearances there. Some Catholics now worship her almost as much as they do Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus far surpasses his mother with flesh-and-blood sightings. In fact, he may have even reincarnated...as Elvis!

At least a couple of Internet websites have noted the mind-boggling similarities between Jesus and the late singer Elvis Presley. Here are just a few:

Jesus said, "Love thy neighbor." Elvis said, "Don't be cruel."

Jesus is the Lord's shepherd. Elvis dated Cybill Shepherd.

Jesus was part of the Trinity. Elvis' first band was a trio.

Jesus walked on water. Elvis surfed. (*Blue Hawaii,* 1965).

Jesus' entourage (the Apostles) had twelve members. Elvis' entourage (the Memphis Mafia) had twelve members.

Jesus was resurrected. Elvis had the famous 1968 "comeback" TV special.

Jesus said, "If a man thirst, let him come to me and drink." Elvis said, "Drinks on me." (*Jail House Rock,* 1957).

Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. Elvis also had irregular eating habits (*e.g.,* a five banana split breakfast).

Sadly, the Elvis-Was-Jesus Theory was demolished when the person behind the *doomdiva.com* website went on a mission:

> Many people have asked Me if I had found Jesus. Well, I thought about the idea for some time, and decided to drop My affiliations with the Center for Missing and Exploited Children and occupy Myself with finding Jesus instead!

Doomdiva's quest yielded astounding eyewitness reports showing that Jesus walks among us today, not unlike Elvis after his alleged death. Here are just a few of the sightings:

Along the Sunset Strip in West Hollywood at the Whiskey-A-Go-Go club, a Christian-themed heavy metal band called The Apostles mysteriously appeared as a backup band, and the lightning backdrop looked strangely real. In a weird twist of events, the owner of the Whiskey had no recollection of this band.

In Baltimore and Miami, Jesus was seen bartending, and in Milwaukee he was bagging groceries at a Pick-N-Save supermarket. He demonstrated his love for rock music by sitting fourth row center at the Black Sabbath reunion tour in Dallas.

And Doomdiva's proof that Elvis was not the reincarnation of Jesus? They were seen together at a MacDonalds restaurant in Las Vegas where Jesus was flipping burgers and Elvis was taking orders. They were two different people. This revelation should not be cause for despair because Jesus is doing more important things than just satisfying people's hunger for beef:

For the last thirty years, artist, author and lecturer Benjamin Creme has been preparing the world for the emergence of Maitreya the World Teacher. Creme's Maitreya is the fulfillment of Buddhist and other prophecies who was initially photographed in 1988 when he appeared "out of the blue" to people in Nairobi, Kenya. Maitreya comes across as a serious-looking, but hopefully a decent enough, sort of chap with a black beard and white clothing who presently lives in London. Maitreya is awaiting the right moment to emerge into our world, which will be soon. In the meantime he works behind the scenes...sometimes with Jesus! In fact, if you go to Creme's lectures, you might enjoy a chance encounter with Jesus even if you do not immediately recognize him:

During a Creme lecture in Los Angeles in July 2004, a volunteer at the book table was approached by two young women, one with blonde hair and one with brown. The ladies demanded that the volunteer explain to them who Maitreya was and refused to ask another worker. The volunteer felt "tested." Creme later telepathically confirmed with his spiritual Master that the blonde lady was Maitreya and the brunette was none other than Jesus! It is not clear if the two "women" were actually female, or if Maitreya and Jesus sometimes do drag together.

During that same month in New York at another Creme lecture, a visitor and friend encountered two old men on the sidewalk and began a conversation. One of the old men wore a blue suit and the other brown slacks. The blue-suited man spoke many languages and grumbled, "If we were walking in Rio right now, you would

know other people. Here you don't know anyone and if you don't know anybody you are nobody." The two old men then entered a deli and sat at a table with a third gentleman who looked like Benjamin Creme in a black cap. Creme's Master later confirmed that the grumpy man in the blue suit was Jesus, the man in brown slacks was Maitreya, and the man in black cap was a disciple imitating Benjamin Creme.

Jesus makes himself available to us in another way. He allows himself to be channeled through a wide assortment of people. Simply go to the Internet, search for "channeled Jesus," and his recent pronouncements are available at the click of a mouse. Some of his channeled words even became a best-selling book, *A Course in Miracles,* through the vehicle of Helen Schucman who was no less than a professor and psychologist at Columbia University. Who says that Jesus does not travel in prestigious circles?

Yes, we have been poking a bit of fun here. People around the world continue to hunger for an intimate connection to Jesus, whether it is through celluloid, a framed tortilla, or a trance. Miracles, or the appearance of them, are still seen as affirmations that there is a spiritual dimension to life even in our humdrum every day world. Behind the burnt toast, Creme's Share International organization, and the Jesus channelers we discover many sincere people who strive to enlighten and improve our lives, and through Jesus they continue to seek their means.

Appendix

Jesus and the Second Coming

As the first edition of this book goes to press, a set of novels known as the Left Behind series is enjoying considerable popularity. Unabashedly apocalyptic, these stories tell of the Rapture and End Times when all good Christians will be abruptly taken to heaven while everyone else is left behind to face the evils on Earth. The Left Behind books owe their success to the enduring fascination that Christians have with the Biblical promise of Jesus' Second Coming. In fact, a growing impatience seems to drive these prophecies—a wish that Jesus would just hurry up and get here.

But what did he really promise them? Christians seem to be clear on this question up to a point: Jesus prophesied that he will come back in the future at a time when human society is in trouble, and his arrival will usher in an era when faithful believers will experience peace and happiness (the "Millennium"). Human souls will also undergo some type of judgment process. These basic millennialist beliefs are sometimes categorized into three main schools of thought: "amillennialism," "premillennialism," and "postmillennialism."

Amillennialism (a.k.a. nonmillennialism) was popularized by Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430) and became the most widely-held view of the Christian church until the nineteenth century. Some mainline Protestant denominations still teach it today, and the Catholic Church follows a variation of it. Amillennialists believe that the Kingdom of God is already present in the world, but good and evil will continue to exist until the current "Church Age" ends suddenly with the return of Christ from the sky. A Rapture follows, and the redeemed are taken to heaven where they will have "spiritual bodies." Most of humanity will be condemned to Hell for eternity, and the Earth will be abandoned. The Antichrist is figurative and not a real person.

Premillennialism (a.k.a. "catastrophic millennialism") interprets the Bible very literally and is especially popular with American evangelicals. Premillennialists believe that human society is fatally flawed. Humanity will be saved as the result of worldwide destruc-

tion and the return of Jesus, whereupon a new era of peace will emerge under the leadership of Christ and his saints. Premillennialists often find great sport in matching current events to the colorful symbols in *Revelation* to prove that the End Times are almost upon us. Premillennialism was embraced by some of the early Church fathers during the first three centuries A.D., but it was subsequently declared a heresy. It was repopularized in the first half of the nineteenth century and took hold with the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909.

Postmillennialism (a.k.a. "progressive millennialism") is less literal. It foresees a thousand-year period when Christian ideals will prevail as the result of widespread conversion and purification, at the end of which Jesus will return to conduct the Last Judgment. The Millennnium will not start with a bang, but it will be built gradually through the work of devout Christians. There will probably be no literal "Rapture" or "Tribulation." Some postmillennialists believe that the Millennium has already begun and Jesus is due to arrive at the end of it, which will be centuries from now. The strongest proponents of postmillennialism today are Christian Reconstructionists and Dominionists who seek enforcement of their interpretation of Old Testament (Mosaic) law. Some of them advocate legalization of slavery, as well as the death penalty for sins like premarital sex, abortion, idolatry, being rebellious against parents, etc. Dominionists believe that it is their religious duty to dominate all political and civil institutions so that strict Mosaic law can be legally enacted and religious diversity legislated away.

Which perspective is correct, if any? Proponents of each will cite chapter and verse of the Bible to support their positions. The idea of Rapture is perhaps the only element that can be ruled out since it seems to go against Scripture. For example, *Proverbs* 10:30 says, "The righteous will *never* be removed, but the wicked will not remain in the land." (NRSV, emphasis added). *Proverbs* 2:21-22 confirms, "...for the upright will dwell secure in the land and the blameless remain there; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, those who are perfidious uprooted from it." (REB). As for what Jesus believed, he seemed to predict a process in which evil people would be instantly removed without an intervening Rapture of good people: "This is how it will be at the end of time.

The angels will go out, and they will separate the wicked from the good, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (*Matthew* 13:49-50, REB).

There is one big problem that all Christian millennialists face. Jesus may have believed that his Second Coming would happen while some of his Apostles were still alive. ("I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." (*Luke* 21:32, NIV). "Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man." (*Luke* 21:36, NAB). The resurrected Christ said of the Beloved Disciple, "What if I want him to remain until I come?" (*John* 21:23, NAB)). Paul was a contemporary of the Beloved Disciple, and he also thought that the Second Coming was due to happen during that generation. When Jesus failed to return, the prophecy became reinterpreted so that people could proclaim Christ's imminent arrival at any time in history. For example, much of the Christian world believed that the Millennium would arrive with the year A.D. 1000, and there was tremendous disappointment when that did not happen. More recent examples are Adventist founder William Miller who announced that Christ would come in 1843, Mormon founder Joseph Smith who said no later than 1891, Watchtower founder C.T. Russell who proclaimed 1914, and best-selling author Hal Lindsey of *The Late Great Planet Earth* fame who said it would occur around 1988.

What happened? Why the big delay?

Of course, some people say that there has been no delay. God is working according to his/her own timetable and we just need to be patient. Others believe that the Millennium is already unfolding. But to most, the Millennium is still an event to come, and they yearn for it to happen.

There is an extremely important element in Jesus' prophecy that is rarely mentioned in today's climate of Rapture fever. If we give that element the common-sense interpretation that Jesus may have intended, we can understand instantly why God's Kingdom (*i.e.*, human utopia) has not yet arrived, and why it seems to be delayed indefinitely. This interpretation gives us a prophecy that almost any person, from Christian to secular humanist, can embrace. According to the *Gospel of John*, Jesus said these words to his disciples

when he knew that his mortal existence on Earth was coming to an end:

> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it.
>
> *John* 14:16 (REB)

> I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *will teach you everything*, and remind you of all that I have said to you.
>
> *John* 14:25-26 (NRSV, emphasis added)

> I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.
>
> *John* 16:12-13 (REB)

These quotes makes it clear that Jesus did not teach his disciples everything they needed to know. "All truth" did not arrive with him. He was simply setting the foundation for it to come later after he was gone*.

The above passages are often interpreted to mean that Jesus was promising his Apostles that the "Holy Spirit," also referred to as the spirit of Truth, would infuse and guide them in Christ's place. The Holy Spirit is said to be one of the three parts of God: Father (*i.e.*, God), Son (*i.e.*, Jesus), and Holy Spirit (a.k.a. the Holy Ghost, Comforter, Advocate, Paraclete, Intercessor, etc.). It is a type of spiritual entity that can enter people and make them conduits for God. Devout Christians are often said to be "filled with the Holy Spirit." Jesus' words suggest that the Holy Ghost will do its teaching

* *The NIV Study Bible* tells us, "From [*John*] 16:12 we learn that though Jesus had let his disciples know as much as they were able to absorb of the Father's plan, the revelation was not yet complete. The Spirit would make other things known in due course." (p. 1627).

before the Second Coming. In other words, the Second Coming will not happen until a profound wisdom has infused human society, *i.e.*, "all truth" has been revealed. Some people interpret these prophecies to mean that the Great Judgment will not be done in words, but rather it will be happen in an instant when Divine illumination causes every creature/person to thoroughly understand his/her own moral condition and that of every fellow creature. Attaining such a state of "all-knowing" would require that people's wisdom be increased substantially, and according to Jesus, that is the mission of the Holy Spirit. The Gospels indicate that Christ's role at the Second Coming will be that of a judge; he will not be a teacher in the same way that he was the first time around.

The odd thing about the Holy Spirit is that it is frequently referred to as a "He." *The Catholic Encyclopedia* says that He is distinct as a person from the Father and Son even if He comes from the same source or substance, just like Jesus. The Holy Spirit is said to know the deepest mysteries of God (*1 Corinthians* 2:10-11) and to possess all knowledge (*2 Corinthians* 13:13). However, it is obvious today that people who are "filled with the Holy Spirit" do not know all of the deepest mysteries of God and do not possess total truth no matter how intelligent and pious they may be, and they will usually be the first to admit it.

Muslims, on the other hand, who do not believe in a Trinity, often say that their prophet Muhammad was the "Comforter" predicted by Jesus and that the *Koran* is the completion of all religion. Christians disagree.

If Muhammad was not the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy, then how would the Holy Ghost teach everything? Will "He" write a book or give lectures? Is He going to come back as a lawyer-type (the "Advocate") who both teaches and advocates on behalf of humanity? How will the entire human race become so wise that people are "all-knowing" about themselves and their fellows?

Most Christians believe that the Holy Spirit ("spirit of truth") works through many people, and this is probably the best interpretation of the Holy Spirit/Second Coming Prophecy. Common sense tells us that the "spirit of truth" would need to inspire a very large number of people, perhaps the majority of the population, in order for humanity to reach a synthesis of knowledge that triggers the grand "a-ha!" of ultimate realization on a global scale, which brings

about the "Kingdom of God." It reflects the notion that souls are the offspring of a Supreme Being, and they can become wise enough to see every truth about each other, good and bad, so that everything that was hidden becomes known.

The Bible's "Spirit of Truth" can be, and often is, interpreted to mean just that: a spirit of truth. Important knowledge must of necessity take many forms and come from many sources. A spirit of truth working through the human population will (and perhaps must) bring forth profound knowledge through almost every kind of person, from thoughtful religious thinkers to secular scientists, from artists to technocrats. This reveals a point where mistranslations and misinterpretations of the Bible may be causing many Christians to work against the spirit of truth and hence against God's plan. They are taught to follow only strict interpretations of the Bible, but this freezes progress in many areas of knowledge even though Jesus advised his Apostles that his lessons did not give them the total picture. New wisdom acquired through a spirit of truth will inevitably look and sound different in many ways than what had existed earlier.

On the other hand, the New Testament warns Christians about a genuine concern: false "Christs" and spiritual teachers who will lead people astray. People occasionally come along declaring that they teach the true way to salvation, and/or they say that they are the fulfillment of this-or-that religious prophecy. Many of them are sincere and offer good food for thought, but have they provided us with *all* truth and ultimate salvation? Not yet, and that is why it is so important to encourage a spirit of truth in all areas of study.

In regard to the spirit of truth, Jesus issued a warning:

> ...every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the [Holy] Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.
>
> *Matthew* 12:31-32 (NIV)

Variations on this passage are found in *Mark* 3:28-29 and *Luke* 12:10. The statement is commonly interpreted to mean that it is an unforgivable sin to attribute the works of God to Satan. However, it seems to have a broader context, especially in *Luke*. If we define Holy Spirit the same way here as elsewhere in the Gospels, namely as spirit of Truth, then Jesus may have issued a stern warning that should give all believers pause:

People who speak and work against a spirit of truth will not be forgiven when Judgment arrives. It is alright to believe many wrong things, including about Jesus (a.k.a. the Son of Man) as long as people are acting in a spirit of truth. People can eventually be forgiven all kinds of sins and crimes, but Jesus indicated that speaking and working against a spirit of truth will not be forgiven, ever. When we consider how strongly Christ denounced hypocrites, he would no doubt include among the unforgiven those people who use Christianity as a bludgeon against truth-seekers.

Why would Christ make this so important? Why might this be the only unforgivable sin in God's eyes, according to Jesus? Perhaps it is because perception, knowledge, and understanding are the factors that most affect the welfare of the soul. The popular phrase, "the truth will set you free" applies to salvation, at least according to Christ. The corollary is, "falsehood will keep you spiritually imprisoned." Anyone who tries to prevent the arrival of "all truth" is hindering God's announced desire to see an end to the spiritual crisis plaguing souls on Earth. This seems to be the scary exception to Jesus' message of forgiveness: even if you believe that you have been "saved" by following the current Christian formula, Jesus has told you that you are not saved, and you will be forever condemned, if you speak or act against the spirit of truth.

Few people today would argue against the proposition that something akin to a human utopia would result if the world were permeated by a genuine spirit of truth. Imagine if politicians, corporate officers, lawyers, religious leaders, news purveyers, and everyone else who significantly affects our lives were to be infused with such a spirit? The result might not be as comical as Jim Carey's movie *Liar Liar*, but the world would transform. A spirit of truth on a global scale has never happened, and this explains instantly why "God's Kingdom" (*i.e.*, a world of peace, justice, and salvation)

keeps getting delayed and why the expectations of so many Christians are constantly disappointed. After Jesus departed, Paul and his circle hardly acted in a spirit of truth by the manner in which they attacked other Christians who held different beliefs than theirs. Later church leaders behaved even worse, leading to the atrocities of the Crusades and Inquisition. (Much to his credit, the late Pope John Paul II apologized for many of those excesses.) Today's world is still beset by dogmas that fight against inquiry, willful disinformation and obsessive secrecy that promote dubious political objectives, scientific conceits that ridicule contrary ideas, procedural rules that sometimes prevent truth from being revealed in courtrooms, news purveyers that fail to investigate, public relations campaigns that hide corporate malfeasance, and schools that do not teach well enough.

Perhaps the biggest impediment to the spirit of truth, and why the utopia predicted by Jesus does not arrive, is that too few people demand it of their leaders and those who significantly affect them. This lack of demand usually derives from the best of intentions, such as a desire to be faithful to a country, religion, or idea. Unfortunately, this natural desire in people is easily exploited by those who have no qualms about lying or being reckless with truth for self-serving reasons. If people allow important lies to go unchallenged, the spirit of truth will never take hold. Truth can be ugly, it can hurt, and it can shock. It is sometimes intensely embarrassing. This can make us feel uncomfortable about demanding truth in regard to important things that affect our welfare, and why it is often easier to accept a comforting "spin." However, truth can also be inspiring and bring great relief. When we act in a spirit of truth, we need to be ready to feel all of these emotions, good and bad. If we are not ready, God's Kingdom will never arrive no matter how many hymns are sung, expressions of faith are made, or symbols from *Revelation* are reinterpreted. The arrival of the spirit of truth seems to be Jesus' missing ingredient, and until we pursue it and demand it of those who significantly affect us, utopia will remain delayed.

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"In the year 17 of the Emperor Tiberius Caesar, and the 27th day of March, in the city of Holy Jerusalem—Annas and Caiaphas being priests and sacrificators of the people of God—Pontius Pilate, Governor of Lower Galilee, in the chair of

the praetory, condemns JESUS OF NAZARETH to die on the cross between two thieves, the great and notorious evidence of the people saying:

"1. Jesus is a seducer.

"2. He is seditious.

"3. He is the enemy of the law.

"4. He falsely calls himself the Son of God.

"5. He falsely calls himself King of Israel.

"6. He enters into the Temple, followed by a multitude bearing palm-branches in their hands.

"Order: The First Centurion, Quilius Cornelius, will lead him to the place of execution.

"Order: All persons are forbidden to oppose the death of this man.

"Order: The procession shall go out of the city, on the day of execution, by the gate Streunius.

"PONTIUS PILATE, Governor of Lower Galilee.

"Witnesses:

"1. DANIEL ROBANI.

"2. JOANNUS ROBANI.

"3. RAPHAEL ROBANI.

"4. CAPET, a citizen."

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"There has appeared in our times, and there still lives, a man of great power (virtue), called Jesus Christ. The people call him prophet of truth; his disciples, son of God. He raises the dead, and heals infirmities. He is a man of medium size; he has a venerable aspect, and his beholders can both fear and love him. His hair is of the color of the ripe hazel-nut, straight down to the ears, but below the ears wavy and curled, with a bluish and bright reflection, flowing over his shoulders. It is parted in two on the top of the head, after the pattern of the Nazarenes. His brow is smooth and very cheerful, with a face without wrinkle or spot, embellished by a slightly reddish complexion. His nose and mouth are faultless. His beard is abundant, of the color of his hair, not long, but divided at the chin. His aspect is simple and mature, his eyes are changeable and bright. He is terrible in his reprimands, sweet and amiable in his admonitions, cheerful without loss of gravity. He was never known to laugh, but often to weep. His stature is straight, his hands and arms beautiful to behold. His conversation is grave, infrequent, and modest. He is the most beautiful among the children of men."

On page 140 of his book *Jesus Now* (1973, New York, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.) Malachi Martin offers this excerpt of the letter:

"..nut-brown hair that is smooth down to the ears and from the ears downward forms soft curls and flows on his shoulders in luxuriant locks, with a parting in the center of his head after the fashion of the Nazarenes, a smooth clear brow, and a reddish face without spots or wrinkles. Nose and mouth are flawless, he wears a full luxuriant beard which is the same color as his hair and is parted in the middle; he has blue-gray eyes with an unusually varied capacity for expression."

The Archko Volume contains two apocryphal writings that purport to give eyewitness descriptions of Jesus. *Gamaliel's Interview With Joseph and Mary and Others Concerning Jesus* begins by telling us about Jesus' father Joseph: "Joseph is a wood-workman. He is very tall and ugly. His hair looks as though it might have been dark auburn when young. His eyes are gray and vicious. He is anything but predisposing in his appearance, and he is as gross and glum as he looks.

He is but a poor talker, and it seems that yes and no are the depth of his mind. I am satisfied he is very disagreeable to his family. His children look very much like him, and upon the whole I should call them a third-rate family...I discovered that all of Joseph's ideas were of a selfish kind. All he thought of was himself." (McIntosh, Dr. and Dr. Twyman, *The Archko Volume* (1887), republished by The Book Tree (Escondido), pp. 79-80, 82).

Gamaliel then writes about mother Mary: "Mary is an altogether a different character, and she is too noble to be the wife of such a man. She seems to be about forty or forty-five years of age, abounds with a cheerful and happy spirit and is full of happy fancies. She is fair to see, rather fleshy, has soft and innocent-looking eyes, and seems to be naturally a good woman...I asked her if Jesus was the son of Joseph. She said he was not." (*Ibid.,* p. 82).

Gamaliel finally provides us with a description of Jesus, as told to him by a Jewish teacher who was personally acquainted with Christ: "He is the picture of his mother, only he has not her smooth, round face. His hair is a little more golden than hers, though it is as much from sunburn as anything else. He is tall, and his shoulders are a little drooped; his visage is thin and of a swarthy complexion, though this is from exposure. His eyes are large and a soft blue, and rather dull and heavy. The lashes are long, and his eyebrows very large. His nose is that of a Jew. In fact, he reminds me of an old-fashioned Jew in every sense of the word. He is not a great talker, unless there is something brought up about heaven and divine things, when his tongue moves glibly and his eyes light up with a peculiar brilliancy; though there is this peculiarity about Jesus, he never argues a question; he never disputes." (*Ibid.,* p. 92).

In *Report of Pilate to Tiberius (Archko* version), Pilate claims to have personally seen Jesus: "One day in passing by the place of Siloe, where there was a great concourse of people, I observed in the midst of the group a young man who was leaning against a tree, calmly addressing the multitude. I was told it was Jesus. This I could easily have suspected, so great was the difference between him and those listening to him. His golden-colored hair and beard gave to his appearance a celestial aspect. He appeared to be about thirty years of age. Never have I seen a sweeter or more serene countenance." (*Ibid.,* p. 131).

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3. Barker, Kenneth (ed.), *The NIV Study Bible* (1985, Grand Rapids), Zondervan Publishing House, p. 1618.
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8. *In Gamaliel's Interview with Joseph and Mary and Others concerning Jesus* from the apocryphal *Archko Volume,* we find Jesus portrayed as a 26-year-old man who had no interest in women despite their strong attraction to him. Christ's disinterest in the opposite sex was due to his personality, not his beliefs. The following exchange is reported between Gamaliel and mother Mary:

"I [*i.e.,* Gamaliel] asked if she [*i.e.,* mother Mary] saw in him [*i.e.,* Jesus] any particular fondness for female society. She said she had not; if anything, rather the contrary; that the young *bethaul* (the word in Hebrew for young women) were all very fond of him, and were always seeking his society, and yet he seemed to care nothing for them; and if they appeared too fond of him, he treated them almost with scorn. He will often get up and leave them, and wander away and spend his time in meditation and prayer. He is a perfect ascetic in his life." (McIntosh, Dr. and Dr. Twyman, *The Archko Volume* (1887), republished by The Book Tree, p. 85.) It is common for "clueless" relatives to believe that a closeted gay person is simply being chaste, as this quote suggests.

The next person interviewed by Gamaliel was a friend of Christ named Massalian—a wise Jewish scholar. Massalian assumed that Jesus had a romantic relationship with a woman but admitted that he had never actually witnessed a courtship: "Massalian said he [*i.e.,* Jesus] was often at Bethany with a young family, and he thought there was some love affair between him and one of the girls. I asked him if he had seen anything like a courtship between them. He said he

had not, but inferred from their intimacy and from the fondness on the woman's part, as well as from the laws of nature, that such would be the case." (*Ibid.*, p. 86).

Gamaliel then visited the family in Bethany and learned from the young ladies that Jesus was not involved with either of them. Instead, he spent a great deal of time with Lazarus in a way that suggests deep love: "I went from there [*i.e.*, Massalian's home] to Bethany, but Jesus was not there. They said he and Lazarus were away, they could not tell where. I went and saw Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, and had a long talk with them. They are very pleasant and nice young maids, and Mary is quite handsome. I teased her about Jesus, but they both denied that Jesus was anything like a lover; he was only a friend; though this is so common for young maids I did not know whether to believe them or not until I told them my real business...They then told me upon their honor that Jesus never talked or even hinted to either one of them on the subject of marriage. Martha blushed, and said she wished he had. If he was to be a king, she would like to be queen. I asked them if they had ever seen him in the company of young virgins. They said they had not. I asked them if they had heard him talk about young girls, or if he sought their society more than that of men; and they both declared they had not, and they were very much surprised that he did not. I asked them what he talked of when in their company; and they said he was not much in their company; that he and their brother would go upon the housetop and stay there half the night, and sometimes all night, talking and arguing points of interest to them both...I asked them what was their brother's opinion of him. They said he thought there never was such a man on earth. He thought him to be one of God's prophets. He said when they were out in the mountains, as they are most all the time, Jesus can tell him all about the flowers, trees, and rocks, can tell him everything in the world, and that none of the wild animals are afraid of him. He says that no poisonous serpent will offer to hiss at him. Their brother thinks he is perfectly safe if Jesus is with him. (*Ibid.*, pp. 93-94).

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11. *Ibid.*, p. 475.

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Gamaliel's Interview with Joseph and Mary and Others concerning Jesus, describes events prior to Mary becoming pregnant while still a virgin. Father Joseph and Mary were separately visited by apparitions that they believed to be

angels, but which seem to have been high-tech projected images. Mary said that she was grinding a meal one day when at the door appeared "a stranger in shining raiment, which showed as bright as the light..." (p. 82). When the stranger finished his announcement to her, "he seemed to melt away like the extinguishing of a light..." (p. 83). Joseph had a later similar experience while working under a shed when "a man in snowy white stood by his side...." (p. 80). After telling Joseph about the child that would be born to Mary, the entity "disappeared like the melting down of a light..." (p. 81). These episodes are not unlike the visions of Mormon founder Joseph Smith, which some theorists suggest were UFO events.

Jonathan's Interview with the Bethlehem Shepherds contains this detailed description of Christ's birth that is without precedent in the gospel and apocryphal literature, and it closely mirrors UFO accounts from other times in history. It seems that the shepherds and people of Bethlehem were provided with a dramatic show that included lighting effects and music:

"...I met with two men, who said they were shepherds, and were watching their flocks near Bethlehem. They told me that while attending to their sheep, the night being cold and chilly, some of them had made fires to warm themselves, and some of them had laid down and were asleep; that they were awakened by those who were keeping watch with the questions: "What does all this mean? Behold, how light it is;" that when they were aroused it was light as day. But they knew it was not daylight, for it was only the third watch. All at once the air seemed to be filled with human voices, saying, "Glory! Glory! Glory to the most high God!" and "Happy are thou, Bethlehem, for God hath fulfilled His promise to the fathers; for in thy chambers is born the King that shall rule in righteousness." Their shouting would rise up in the heavens, and then would sink down in mellow strains, and roll along at the foot of the mountains, and die away in the most soft and musical manner they had ever heard; then it would begin again high up in the heavens, in the very vaults of the sky, and descend in sweet and melodious strains, so that they could not refrain from shouting and weeping at the same time. The light would seem to burst forth high up in the heavens, and then descend in softer rays and light up the hills and valleys, making everything more visible than the light of the sun, though it was not so brilliant, but clearer, like the brightest moon. I asked them how they felt—if they were not afraid; they said at first they were; but after a while it seemed to calm their spirits, and so fill their hearts with love and tranquility that they felt more like giving thanks than anything else. They said it was around the whole city, and some of the people were almost scared to death. Some said the world was on fire; some said the gods were coming down to destroy them; others said a star had fallen; until Melker the priest came out shouting and clapping his hands, seeming to be frantic with joy." (p. 64-65).

The *Archko* version of *Pilate's Report* claims that a Roman lieutenant, Ben Isham, who was one of a hundred soldiers sent to guard Jesus' tomb, made the following report to Pilate: "I sent for this man Isham, who related to me, as near as I can recollect, the following circumstances: He said that at about the beginning of the fourth watch they saw a soft and beautiful light over the sepulchre. He at first thought that the women had come to embalm the body of Jesus, as was their custom, but he could not see how they had gotten through the guards. While these thoughts were passing through his mind, behold, the whole place was lighted up, and there seemed to be crowds of the dead in their graveclothes. All seemed to be shouting and filled with ecstasy, while all around and above was the most beautiful music he had ever heard; and the whole air seemed to be full of voices praising God. At this time there seemed to be a reeling and swimming of the earth, so that he turned so sick and faint that he could not stand on his feet. He said the earth seemed to swim from under him, and his senses left him, so that he knew not what did occur. I asked him in what condition he was when he came to himself. He said he was lying on the ground with his face down. I asked him if he could not have been mistaken as to the light. Was it not day that was coming in the East? He said at first he thought of that, but at a stone's cast it was exceedingly dark; and then he remembered it was too early for day. I asked him if his dizziness might not have come from being wakened up and getting up too suddenly, as it sometimes had that effect. He said he was not, and had not been asleep all night, as the penalty was death for him to sleep on duty...I asked him how long the scene lasted. He said he did not know, but he thought nearly an hour." (p. 145-146). This description resembles the birth phenomena quoted earlier; in other words, the Nativity show was repeated at Christ's crucifixion with brilliant directed light, music, and visual effects—perhaps projected images. What makes this passage noteworthy is the vertigo effect suffered by the soldier, suggesting a strong electromagnetic influence.

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